

The Other Cultural Revolution

The Academic Uprising of the American China Scholar in the 1960s

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April 20, 2012

Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which young American China scholars, incensed by the outrages of the Vietnam War and frustrated with the political timidity of their older professors, used the Chinese Cultural Revolution as a source of inspiration for their own scholarly revolution. In particular, it focuses on those China scholars who joined The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, a coalition of graduate students and young professors in East Asian Studies seeking a new, more empathetic approach to the study of Asia. Eager to identify with the Chinese masses, these scholars imagined themselves to be in league with Mao Zedong and his Red Guards, fighting against similarly bureaucratic and politically backward structures of authority at home. In telling the story of these revolutionary academics, this thesis supplements published reports with interviews and archival sources to illustrate the larger goals and motivations behind the mistranslation of such a disastrous era in modern Chinese history.

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Image

“Meet the Author’ Party”

Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank all those who I had the privilege of interviewing for this thesis. I am very grateful to Edward Friedman, Mark Selden, and Vera Schwarcz for enriching my knowledge of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars and making this project feel that much more alive. Thank you to Richard Cone, Soren Pfeffer, and Elinor Bacon for helping me tell the story of Professor Richard Pfeffer and sharing their recollections of such an amazing friend and family member.

Next, I want to thank those at Haverford who made this experience so rewarding. Thank you to James Gulick and Margaret Schaus for helping me find so many valuable resources. Thank you to my classmate Danielle Harrison for so willingly helping me with formatting issues.

Thank you to the History Department, in particular Professor Linda Gerstein, whose charisma inspired me to become a History major in the first place. A special thanks to my close friend Max Fater whose enthusiasm for the Senior Thesis, as with everything else, was really contagious.

I'd especially like to thank my First and Second Readers, Professor Paul Smith and Professor Andrew Friedman. Thank you so much to Professor Smith for providing excellent critique and for being my resident China expert, putting me in touch with such a wide array of China scholars. Thank you to Professor Friedman for totally destroying my previous understanding of what it means to study history and providing me with the tools for stronger analysis.

I'd also like to thank Professor Jerome Cohen of New York University for having dinner with me and discussing my thesis with such interest and enthusiasm.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank my parents, Sue Kaplan and David Karnovsky for suggesting this topic to me and for being the most supportive and valuable friends I have.

Introduction

The Chinese Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, was in many ways a disastrous era in China's political history. Even the Chinese government admits this much, stating that the Cultural Revolution was "responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People's Republic."¹ Led by Chairman Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution in its rhetoric intended to create a new form of participatory politics, eliminating the divide between the entrenched elite and the common people, and ridding the country of stagnant and corrupt bureaucratic institutions. But by the 1980's, with the release of "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue*) and other reports of violence and chaos, any allure that the Cultural Revolution might have had vanished under these devastating accounts of human suffering.²

Indeed, in studying the Cultural Revolution, historians have chosen to look beyond the stated goals of the movement, seeking alternative motives that more accurately explain its darkest elements. According to Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, the Cultural Revolution was not a misguided attempt at political egalitarianism, but a desperate reclamation of power by a tyrannical and politically paranoid Mao Zedong. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals argue that the Chairman "unleashed" the Cultural Revolution in an attempt to regain the unconditional loyalty of the Chinese people and undermine the larger party organization.³ The

¹ Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Part of China, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," June 27, 1981, www.marxists.org/subject/document/cpc/history/01.htm.

² Joseph Esherick, Paul Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 12.

³ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 462.

title of MacFarquhar's and Schoenhals' book, *Mao's Last Revolution*, reveals the extent to which these authors view the Cultural Revolution as a manifestation of the Chairman's own psyche.

Though the Chinese people became deeply involved in the Cultural Revolution, MacFarquhar and Schoenhals argue that this activism was rooted more in a desire for self-preservation and a repressed, misdirected anger towards neighbors and colleagues than ideological belief. Fearful for their own safety, the Chinese masses attempted to "work towards" the Chairman, targeting their neighbors, bosses, and coworkers so as to deflect ire away from themselves. In describing the experience of university students in Beijing, the authors write that "[i]n a whirl of conflicting emotions, students cudged their brains as to how to find fault with classroom teachers...[t]hey wished to avoid criticism from their peers for being only indifferently revolutionary."⁴ Others at times used the confusion of the Cultural Revolution to settle unrelated scores and voice previously repressed frustrations. According to Joseph Esherick, the Cultural Revolution provided a unique environment in which social groups could pursue their conflicting interests, "mask[ing]" their goals in "a political rhetoric that sought to justify private ends."⁵ In this way, by questioning the sincerity of Cultural Revolution rhetoric, historians have successfully disentangled the cruel realities of the Cultural Revolution from its ideological justifications.

In light of this historical condemnation of the Cultural Revolution, those 1960s and 1970s American academics who believed in the movement as a progressive, populist uprising, have become easy targets for criticism. In particular, Australian China scholar Simon Leys has aggressively attacked left-wing American China experts for their inability to see the Cultural

⁴ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 68.

⁵ Esherick, Pickowicz, and Walder, 4.

Revolution the way he did: As an unqualified disaster. In his polemic, *The Chairman's New Clothes*, Leys suggests that the pro-Cultural Revolution academic was guilty of a cultivated ignorance: "Our present-day philosophers seem...unwilling to enquire into the historical truth of maoism, no doubt fearing that to meet reality face to face might harm the myth that so conveniently excuses them from having to think for themselves."⁶ According to Leys, American China scholars had succumbed to the transhistorical allure of rose-tinted glasses:

What people believe is essentially what they *wish* to believe. They cultivate illusions out of idealism—and also out of cynicism. They follow their own visions because doing so satisfies their religious cravings, and also because it is expedient. They seek beliefs that can exalt their souls, and that can fill their bellies. They believe out of generosity, and also because it serves their interests. They believe because they are stupid, and also because they are clever. Simply, they believe in order to survive. And because they need to survive, sometimes they could gladly kill whoever has the insensitivity, cruelty, and inhumanity to deny them their life-supporting lies.⁷

Here, though Leys humanizes the mistakes of his colleagues, he nevertheless condemns them for acting unprofessionally. American China experts, he argues, relinquished their objectivity, projecting onto the Cultural Revolution dissatisfactions with their own emotional and intellectual lives. Indeed, for Leys the greatest fault of the China scholar was his inability to step back and judge the Cultural Revolution from a critical, scholarly point of view. Instead, American China scholars subscribed to a sloppy relativism, choosing to believe that "the Chinese people were as different from us in their fundamental aspirations...as the inhabitants of the ocean depths."⁸

These intellectuals often did employ a radically relativistic approach to their study of China and the Cultural Revolution, explaining away the violence and chaos as part of a larger cultural and historical context that could not be judged within a Western moral framework. In

⁶Simon Leys, *The Chairman's New Clothes* (New York: St. Martin's, 1977), 9.

⁷Simon Leys, "The Curse of the Man Who Could See the Little Fish at the Bottom of the Ocean," *The New York Review of Books*, July 20, 1989.

⁸Simon Leys, *The Burning Forest: Essays on Chinese Culture and Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986), 194-195.

Orville Schell's account of his 1974 journey to China, *In the People's Republic*, the scholar shows a profound reluctance to criticize anything about China, attempting to understand the country entirely on its own terms as a totally foreign entity. In an effort to remain culturally sensitive, Schell relinquishes all critical judgment, characterizing such skepticism as just another product of his Americanness. But by entering into this process of de-culturalization and radical self-doubt, Schell blinds himself to the inadequacies and cruelties of the Chinese government and people. When Schell finds something about China glaring or uncomfortable, he attributes this feeling to the "inadequa[cies]" of his own cultural biases rather than to an objective systemic problem.⁹ According to political scientist and China expert Harry Harding, this type of uncritical approach amounted to an endorsement of Cultural Revolution violence. American China scholars, titillated by the possibilities of transcending their own cultural narrowness, displayed a moral flexibility that excused Cultural Revolution killings and beatings as a natural part of the movement. "[M]ost American scholars," he writes, "believed that the costs of the Cultural Revolution were tolerable, even necessary. One could not make an omelet without breaking eggs."¹⁰

According to contemporary scholars of China, left-wing academics were drawn to the Cultural Revolution out of disenchantment with the American political system and outrage at the Vietnam War. These academics, inspired by the political activism of their own students, became part of a larger 1960s movement to challenge the American political status quo. Stepping outside of their own field of expertise and engaging with the enraged American public, China scholars allowed China, as a foreign and exotic other, to function as a space for the projection of

⁹ Orville Schell, *In the People's Republic: An American's First-Hand View of Living and Working in China* (New York: Random House, 1977), 113.

¹⁰ Harry Harding, "Reappraising the Cultural Revolution," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 4, 1980, 135.

political fantasies. For these scholars, China came to represent the humane socialist alternative to America's brand of heartless capitalism. According to Steven W. Mosher, "as the Vietnam War dimmed America's faith in her own character and virtue, Communist China would begin to arouse brighter and kindlier emotions... Those who went on to reject America's individualistic ethic and free market economy... found China an inspiring model of communal endeavor." China scholars allowed their scholarship to become "mired in politics," and in doing so, effectively lost sight of China's political realities.¹¹

As Colin Mackerras points out in his book *Western Images of China*, these China scholars, so invested in the representation of China as a Communist utopia, refused to acknowledge even the most obvious signs to the contrary. Often Cultural Revolution enthusiasts supported the movement in the face of disturbing stories of violence and images of human suffering. Indeed, direct sources of information about Cultural Revolution violence and chaos were coming out of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Personal accounts written by Chinese citizens also shed light on new horrors. Even more mainstream media like *The New York Times* covered "savage battles" though they were often relegated to the back pages.¹² Perhaps the most direct evidence of the cruel realities of the Cultural Revolution were the images that spread in the late 1960's of corpses floating from the Chinese mainland into Hong Kong harbor.¹³ In this way, Mackerras, Mosher, and others suggest that the American China scholar was blinded by his own desire for political change. To these 1960s academics, The Cultural Revolution was not a Chinese political reality but a distant and idealized reflection of their own aspirations for America.

¹¹ Steven Mosher, *China Misperceived: American Illusions and Chinese Reality* (New York: Basic, 1990), 125.

¹² Mosher, 124.

¹³ Mackerras, 114.

Though the Cultural Revolution has been widely understood as a destructive, painful era in the history of The People's Republic, more recent scholarship on the movement has sought to reclaim political and intellectual agency for the Chinese masses. Scholars like Paul Clark, Joseph Esherick, Lynne T. White, Kam-Yee Law, Paul Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder refute the notion that the Cultural Revolution can be explained through a top-down approach. These scholars argue that to focus primarily on China's political leadership, in particular Chairman Mao, is to ignore the deeply felt ideological and political aspirations of the Chinese people. In *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, Paul Clark directly criticizes MacFarquhar and Schoenhals for creating a narrative that "focuses on the very top of Chinese politics" and rarely "touch[es] on what these years meant for the ordinary citizen."¹⁴ Rather than view the Cultural Revolution from the perspective of "the highest echelons of politics," Clark chooses to focus his attention on the cultural and artistic spheres. In this way, he attempts to draw out of the violence and the chaos of the Cultural Revolution those elements worth salvaging. "Instead of being perceived simply as a period of destruction" he writes, "the Cultural Revolution can also be seen as an era of...innovation and efforts at real change in China's cultural inheritance." In fact, Clark goes as far as to critique the monopoly that "scar literature" has had over narratives of the Cultural Revolution. Though he acknowledges the brutality of the movement, Clark suggests that these stories of "suffering, persecution, and determined survival," have too often blinded historians to the dynamic cultural and political awakening that the Cultural Revolution engendered in the Chinese people.¹⁵

This bottom-up approach has been more directly applied to the biographies of the Chinese Red Guards. In *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, Xiaowei Zheng's essay

¹⁴ Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: a History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

¹⁵ Clark, 9.

“Passion, Reflection, and Survival: Political Choices of Red Guards at Qinghua University,” describes in detail the various ideological debates between different student factions and the intensity of their desire for true progress. In telling the story of political upheaval at Qinghua, Zheng insists on giving agency to the radicalized students. For Zheng, these activists were not political cogs but thinkers and revolutionaries: “[T]hey did have ideals and they did think. They did not simply develop factions based on their reactions to events or their perceived self-interest... Rather students were seriously developing their political understanding, pursuing the right causes, and striving to realize their ideals through action.”¹⁶ Here, Zheng’s argument stands in sharp contrast to MacFarquhar and Schoenhals’, who depict the student Red Guards as interested primarily in their own self-preservation, and are therefore content to consign the mass appeal of the Cultural Revolution to the realm of pure mystery: “[T]he process by which Mao translated high-level political intrigue into mass mobilization remains one of the many obscure issues of the Cultural Revolution.”¹⁷ By portraying the Chinese masses as a thinking, feeling, and politically motivated group, scholars like Zheng suggest that the Cultural Revolution, despite its horrific failures, was more than a mere political grab for power on the part of Mao and his supporters.

Despite this reframing of the Cultural Revolution as a movement with grassroots political support and even ideological integrity, there has been little matching effort to reinvestigate the role of Cultural Revolution enthusiasts overseas, in particular American China scholars. Indeed, many of these scholars, perhaps in embarrassment, have quietly backed away from their previous support of the movement or apologized for their overzealousness. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the pro-CR publication previously known as the *Bulletin of Concerned*

¹⁶ Esherick, Pickowicz, and Walder, 61.

¹⁷ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 54.

Asian Scholars changed its name to *Critical Asian Studies* as a “self-critical assessmen[t] of the ways in which our efforts affect the world in which we live.”¹⁸ Similarly, in a *New York Review of Books* article titled “Through Red-Colored Glasses,” China scholar Edward Friedman acknowledges his own misreading of the Cultural Revolution. Friedman begins his piece by stating “How little we knew about China!” He goes on to express his grief for the “innocent victims” and contemplates how what was once a “dream” to American scholars so quickly became a “nightmare.”¹⁹ In this way, though historians are making efforts to uncover the motivations of the Chinese people in supporting the Cultural Revolution, endowing these individuals with a humanity that challenges their characterization as a faceless, shape-shifting mass, the American China scholar’s support for the movement remains little more than a quiet source of shame.

In this essay, I hope to bridge this gap in our historical understanding of the Cultural Revolution and its domestic as well as its international appeal. To dismiss the works of these China experts as simply the product of misperception, projection, or lazy scholarship is to limit our historical understanding of their motivations. Like the Chinese people themselves, American China scholars were not just swept up in the politics of their time. Rather these academics were engaged in a meaningful, if at times misdirected, ideological and intellectual project.

This thesis will argue that the American China scholar’s enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution cannot be understood without first examining the greater legacy of the East Asian academic. For pro-CR academics, the Vietnam War and radical 1960s politics did not represent the manifestation of something altogether new, but the culmination of a legacy of American

¹⁸ “About Us,” *Critical Asian Studies*, <http://criticalasianstudies.org/about-us/>.

¹⁹ Edward Friedman, “Through Red-Colored Glasses.” *The New York Review of Books*, October 11, 1981.

tyranny propped up and supported up by the East Asian scholar. According to these radicalized scholars, the American China scholar had become a bureaucratic agent of American governmental interests. Rather than speaking truth to power or showing empathy for peoples of other nations, the Asian scholar had become a self-satisfied tool in the oppression of the East, providing the intellectual justification for American imperialism and eventually the war in Vietnam. Thus, in supporting the Cultural Revolution, China scholars were self-consciously rejecting the traditional role of the China scholar as an Americanized tool of government. As a radical uprising against traditional structures of authority, Mao Tse-Tung's Cultural Revolution spoke in powerful ways to the China scholar as the political manifestation of a scholarly revolution he hoped to enact within his own academic field. Just as student Red Guards challenged traditional modes of Chinese academia, so too would the young China expert revolutionize his own scholarly field. In the same way that Chinese revolutionaries sought to rid the government of lazy, self-interested bureaucrats, these American China scholars imagined themselves to be cleansing their own field of stasis and corruption. Indeed, these China Scholars were not drawn to the Cultural Revolution purely out of anger at the Vietnam War or dissatisfaction with American bureaucracy. Rather they were engaged in a meaningful struggle with the question of what it means to be a student and an expert of another culture.

In this essay, I will focus on the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, a group of young American academics formed in 1968 to reshape U.S. foreign policy in Asia. Using the Committee's publication, the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, as a jumping-off point and extending outward to the literature produced by Committee members and their colleagues, I will provide the context in which these thinkers imagined themselves to be writing. In my first section, *The China Scholar and the Legacy of the Cold War*, I will describe the ways in which

Cold War politics reshaped the field of China studies, producing a more tentative brand of scholarship that the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars would vehemently reject. In my second section, *The Birth of the CCAS*, I will describe the formation of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars and their new, more sympathetic approach to the study of Asia. In the third section, *A New Battleground*, I will show how the CCAS used Cultural Revolution China as the site for the performance of their new scholarly method. Finally, in my fourth section, *The Pfefferian Revolution*, I will tell the story of Professor Ric Pfeffer, an outspoken supporter of the Cultural Revolution who paid a price for his attempts to bring Cultural Revolution reform to the American university system.

Through this project, I hope to align the leftist China scholar's support for the Cultural Revolution with the larger support the movement received from the Chinese masses. Though these two groups, in endorsing the same movement, were fighting for very different things, they were both engaged in a passionate, if at times terribly misguided, attempt at political and ideological reordering. But the bold and innovative intentions of both groups have been overshadowed by the greater cruelties of the Cultural Revolution, its overwhelming violence and chaos. Here, the hope is that by uncovering the motivations behind American academic support for the Cultural Revolution, historians can move beyond the limited structures of condemnation and towards a much more sophisticated notion of identification and understanding. Indeed, the pro-CR academics more empathetic approach to the study of China can serve as a powerful model for our own reexamination of their goals and motivations.

The China Scholar and the Legacy of the Cold War

The Attack of the China Lobby

With the 1949 defeat of Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist government (KMT) and the ascendance of Mao Zedong and the Communists came a ferocious right-wing attack on liberal American China scholars. Anti-Communist politicians and scholars concluded that Chiang Kai-Shek's defeat was due to the half-hearted financial and military support he received from a United States government that had been infiltrated by China scholars overly sympathetic to the Communist cause. According to Nicholas Karolides, the American government was unwilling to commit to a massive intervention in Chinese politics, but when this resulted in the creation of a government unfriendly to the United States, many politicians, particularly conservatives, were nevertheless infuriated and looked for somewhere to place blame.²⁰ American China scholars, they insisted, had "teamed up"²¹ with members of the State Department, successfully pushing U.S. foreign policy in a "pro-Communist direction" by demonizing Chiang Kai-Shek and manipulating public opinion.²²

In an attempt to stave off further attacks from the Republican Party, the Truman administration published what became known as the *China White Paper*, a compilation of correspondences between government officials and diplomats to China describing the failure of Chiang Kai-Shek's party to win the support of the Chinese people. By publishing these once classified documents, the administration hoped to prove that the rise of the Communists was "in

²⁰ Nicholas Karolides Margaret Bald, and Dawn B. Sova, *100 Banned Books: Censorship Histories of World Literature* (New York: Checkmark, 1999), 91.

²¹ Ross Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York: Octagon, 1974), 254.

²² Koen, 152

no way attributable to American policy.”²³ According to Secretary of State Dean Acheson in his introduction to the *White Paper*, “the ominous result of the civil war in China was beyond the control of the government...Nothing that this government did or could have done...could have changed that result.”²⁴ In this way, Acheson hoped that the publication of the *White Paper* would protect his administration and put an end to the finger-pointing.

But the *White Paper* would end up having the opposite effect, further enraging conservatives who saw the publication as evidence that Chiang Kai-Shek had indeed been abandoned by the United States. Outrage at the loss of China to Communists culminated in the 1951-52 Senate Internal Security Subcommittee hearings, chaired by Senator Pat McCarran of Nevada and inspired by the Red Scare rhetoric of Joe McCarthy. McCarran’s central target was the Institute of Pacific Relations, an international coalition of China Scholars formed in the 1920’s and accused by the Subcommittee” of “being instrumental in keeping United States policy in 1945 favorable to the Chinese Communists.”²⁵ Though the IPR was originally conceived of as a “body of men and women deeply interested in the Pacific area, who meet and work, not as representatives of their Governments...but as individuals,” the organization had indeed become increasingly involved in American political life.²⁶ According to Paul F. Hooper, the Institute developed stronger ties with government officials in need of basic information about Asia. “Widespread ignorance about Asia,” he writes, “led to a demand for information (especially on the part of the American military), and much of it came to be directed at the Institute as it was one of very few informed sources.”²⁷ Ire at the IPR was directed at the editor

²³ Lyman P. Van Slyke, Introduction to *The China White Paper* (California: Stanford University Press, 1967), 5.

²⁴ Dean Acheson, “Letter of Transmittal,” *The China White Paper* (California: Stanford University Press, 1967, XVI.

²⁵ Koen, 132.

²⁶ Paul Hooper, “The Institute of Pacific Relations and the Origins of Asian and Pacific Studies,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 100.

²⁷ Hooper, 115.

of its journal *Pacific Affairs*, Professor Owen Lattimore. Lattimore, who served as a political advisor to Chiang Kai-Shek, was accused by Senator McCarthy of being “the top Russian espionage agent in the United States” and brought before the SISS as a representative of the IPR and a “promoter of Communist interests.”²⁸

Governmental attacks on the IPR were complemented by sensationalist literature demonizing liberal China scholars as traitors and spies. Right-wing academics like Freda Utley and John T. Flynn wrote extensively on the supposedly subversive acts of IPR academics, “that... important and influential minority, who during the past decade... defined and administered United States policy in the Far East.”²⁹ In Utley’s book *The China Story* she details precisely “how Communists captured diplomats” by “form[ing] a phalanx” around military leaders, using their expertise to “pu[ll] into their orbit other United States Foreign Service officials not previously identified with a position favorable to the Chinese Communists.”³⁰ In John T. Flynn’s account of the IPR’s role in U.S. foreign policy, he calls the case of Owen Lattimore “the most incredible conspiracy of our time.” According to Flynn, the story of Lattimore and his colleagues represents nothing less than absolute scandal and corruption: “Here we are confronted with an alien web of intrigue, artifice and deceit carried out, not by criminals and characters in the underworld, but by high-ranking officials and agents of our own government who present the appearance of gentlemen and scholars and patriots... It beggars belief.”³¹

²⁸ Eric Pace, “Owen Lattimore, Far East Scholar Accused by McCarthy, Dies at 88.” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1989.

²⁹ Fred Utley, *The China Story* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1951), 103.

³⁰ Utley, 103-110.

³¹ John T. Flynn, *The Lattimore Story* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1953), 1-2.

This flurry of scholarly and governmental accusation ultimately led to the demise of the IPR and the discrediting of liberal China scholarship. The IPR, under intense scrutiny, lost all of its financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation and was forced into dissolution. Though many were acquitted, in the aftermath of the McCarran hearings, Owen Lattimore and his colleagues suffered from a profound “impairment of...reputation.” The “wide publicity given to the accusations made against [liberal] China scholars] and the fact that those accusations had been given the sanction of the United States Senate,” made many mainstream publications reluctant to publish their work.³² Whereas in the 1940s Freda Utley resented the way in which “friends of Communists” seemed to have a “closed shop in the book-reviewing field,”³³ dominating the pages of *The New York Times* and *The Herald Tribune*, from 1952 to 1956 none of the reviews in either of these publications were written by any of those same scholars.³⁴

In 1960, in the aftermath of this assault, Ross Y. Koen published his now infamous book *The China Lobby in American Politics*. Koen detailed the accusations made against the IPR, arguing that China scholars served as an easy scapegoat for what was an inevitable historical event largely outside the sphere of American control. Americans, he asserts, were “simply unable to believe that the Chinese could have made such a momentous decision as to substitute one form of government for another without the active participation and positive concurrence of Washington.”³⁵ Thus, rather than face the anger of the American public, politicians took the “simple step” of placing the blame on the private specialists whose expertise they had enlisted.³⁶ The China Lobby, as Koen termed it, was a highly coordinated attempt on the part of right-wing, virulent anti-Communists to claim a monopoly over the China field and prevent liberal China

³² Koen, 129.

³³ Utley, 144.

³⁴ Koen, 129.

³⁵ Koen, 115.

³⁶ Koen, 15.

scholars from producing anything other than “apolitical-objective scholarship.”³⁷ Indeed, the fact that Koen’s book was largely banned or confiscated after publication served as further evidence of the authoritarian power the China Lobby had gained. According to Richard Kagan, a founding member of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, under pressure from the right-wing political apparatus, over 4000 copies were destroyed by the book’s publisher and many more were stolen from libraries by right wing groups, replaced by copies of Richard Hinton’s conservative counter-narrative, *The Red China Lobby*.³⁸

It wasn’t until 1969 that Koen and his argument were revived by the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, giving him a space within their *Bulletin* to restate his original claims, organizing a conference to discuss the effects of the McCarran hearings on the China field, and republishing his book.³⁹ For the members of the CCAS, the McCarran Hearings and the more general attack on the IPR had done long term damage to the China field, leaving permanent scars on the psyches of its scholars. In his article “McCarran’s Legacy: The Association for Asian Studies,” Richard Kagan illustrates just how grave the impact of the McCarran Hearings really was on the intellects of American China scholars. “The seeds of McCarthyism are within us,” Kagan insists, and as difficult as it may be, the CCAS must “refuse to propagate and nourish them.”⁴⁰ Here, Kagan suggests that the Red Scare fundamentally altered the scholar’s approach to China. Even a devout left-wing CCAS member was capable of unconsciously reinscribing the logic of McCarthyism.

³⁷ Koen, ix.

³⁸ Koen, ix.

³⁹ Koen, xv.

⁴⁰ Richard Kagan, “McCarran’s Legacy: The Association for Asian Studies,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Vol. 1, No. 4, 1969. 21.

For Koen and the CCAS, the recent failures of American foreign policy in Asia, in particular the Vietnam War, could be directly traced back to the legacy of the China Lobby. According to Koen, there was a “direct relationship” between the enforced “acceptance of the views of the pro-Chiang spokesmen in the early 1950s and the tragic presence of the United States in Vietnam today.”⁴¹ Similarly, O. Edmund Clubb wrote that “McCarthyism and the... patterns of thought induced by that demagogic phenomenon were... major factors in bringing about the results we see before us.”⁴² The Red Scare had altered the role of the China scholar, transforming him from an independent thinker into an “exper[t]” and a “social technician,” unwilling to speak truth to power.⁴³ Rather than actively engaging in politics, this new breed of China scholar acquiesced to governmental authority by espousing the value of an objective approach. But for Richard Kagan and the CCAS, the China expert’s supposedly impartial stance was inevitably political in its acceptance of the status quo. Scholars “seek[ing] protection from the most conservative elements in our society” produced timid academic work “reflect[ive] of the fears of the fifties rather than the needs of the seventies.”⁴⁴ Here, Kagan suggests that objectivity is a myth that in practice amounts to an endorsement of political power as it is already exercised. According to the members of the CCAS, the China scholars of the post-McCarthy era had become accessories to the government’s oppression of Asian nation-states.

Indeed, in the aftermath of the McCarran hearings, many China scholars, including former members of the IPR, were very deliberate in their attempts at political neutrality. The

⁴¹ Koen, 30.

⁴² O. Edmund Clubb, “McCarthyism and Our Asian Policy,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1969. 25.

⁴³ Clubb, 20.

⁴⁴ Kagan, 18. Other China Scholars who faced CCAS condemnation for their support of apolitical scholarship include Lucien Pye, Ezra Vogel, Benjamin Schwartz, and Stuart Schram.

Association of Asian Studies (AAS), formed in 1941, rose to prominence after the McCarran hearings, made up in part of former members of the IPR now committed to a less controversial form of China scholarship. In Charles O. Hucker's 1973 history of the AAS he acknowledges the extent to which the organization's intellectual approach was based on lessons learned from the McCarran hearings. In the 1940s and 50s, he writes, the Association "repeatedly felt threatened by political entanglements...most particularly Congressional investigations into the activities of the Institute of Pacific Relations, with which many Association members had long had close ties as individuals." As a result, the AAS became "increasingly dedicated to keeping the Association unambiguously out of politics."⁴⁵ Here, Hucker directly links the dissolution of the IPR to the formation of a new, apolitical approach. He seems to acknowledge that this attempt at objectivity was born out of a survivalist rather than a purely academic impulse. For CCAS members like O. Edmund Clubb, this pragmatic response to political reality was too cynical to bear. Clubb, outraged at the AAS' withdraw[al] from any politically sensitive scholarship or action," accused the organization of accepting "by default... McCarran's... verdict against the IPR" and "incorporat[ing] it into their own posture." In this way, both Hucker as a member of the AAS, and Clubb as an outside critic, acknowledge the organization's willingness to adjust to the demands of a hostile political climate.

Despite the distinctly pragmatic approach of the AAS, two of its leading members, Harvard professors John K. Fairbank and Edwin Reischauer (both previously members of the IPR) took seriously the notion of apolitical scholarship. In studying the work produced by these two scholars in the aftermath of the McCarran Hearings, one can see a genuine struggle to consider China objectively and justify this approach. In Fairbank's 1958 book *The United States*

⁴⁵ Clubb, "McCarthyism and Our Asian Policy," 18.

and China, he defends the new role of the China scholar as a neutral observer rather than a politically engaged actor. "Our only recourse," he writes, is to understand life in China "objectively rather than...subjectively, to seek to become, as it were, a nation of social scientists with a perspective transcending our feelings."⁴⁶ Here, Fairbank proposes an altogether new set of challenges to his fellow China scholars, demanding that they do their best to step outside of themselves and see China for what it is, independent of their own biases. But despite their insistence on objectivity, Fairbank and Reischauer recognize the loftiness of their demands and the impossibility of fully escaping one's own prejudices. In their book *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, these authors acknowledge the inescapable "tendency to project their own values on East Asian history" admitting that "wherever one stands on the political spectrum and however much one compensates for this or that position...one still writes from a specific perspective." Here, Fairbank and Reischauer confront the limitations of their objective approach but only so as to further justify it. Indeed, according to the two Harvard professors, it is precisely this inclination to project that necessitates the "uphill task" of "understand[ing] ourselves and our own built-in perspective."⁴⁷ For Fairbank and Reischauer, the goal of pure objectivity may be unobtainable, but immense value lies in the effort.

Fairbank and Reischauer used this objective method to reconsider the West's historical relationship to China and to argue in favor of Modernization Theory. This theory, developed by sociologist Edward Shils in 1959, had become pervasive in the social sciences at Harvard. Eager to develop a "comprehensive theory" for "understanding the problems common to those areas" labeled the 'third-world,' Harvard academics like Talcot Parsons, head of the Department of

⁴⁶ John K. Fairbank, *The United States and China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 2.

⁴⁷ John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), Xix.

Social Relations, provided a singular definition of modernity based on scientific and technological progress and the birth of democratic institutions.⁴⁸ Parsons and his colleagues argued that “modern societies” like the United States provided “backward” ones with a developmental “road map.” Americans were thus “obligated to go out and help other societies get moving.”⁴⁹

Fairbank and Reischauer adopted Parson’s theory, hoping to achieve a middle ground between condemnation and approval of Western imperialist domination. Fairbank and Reischauer insisted that the intrusion of Western powers in Chinese affairs was a painful, traumatic, and yet ultimately necessary step in the development of the nation. Fairbank and Reischauer were quick to acknowledge the toll that imperialism took on the Chinese people who suffered from humiliation, cultural identity crisis, and even economic exploitation. But for both authors, as difficult as this exposure to Western military and technological superiority was for China, in the end, this confrontation was inevitable and even benevolent. According to Fairbank, “[b]y the nineteenth century, the Chinese position on foreign relations...was out of date and no longer supportable.” If the British were not the first to initiate this tough love on China “all the Western states...would sooner or later have demanded the same things.”⁵⁰

Before direct encounter with the West, the Chinese nation operated within what Fairbank and Reischauer termed “traditional norms.” The country was to be admired for its “disciplined, ethical, self-cultivation” which led to the creation of “stable political patterns” repeated since the nation’s founding. But with the arrival of Western nations, China underwent a violent “transformation,” forcing what was an outdated and stagnant society to adapt to the demands of a

⁴⁸ Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 72.

⁴⁹ Gilman, 88.

⁵⁰ Fairbank, Reischauer, and Craig, 136.

changing world. Whereas, according to Reischauer, Japan was able to effectively “respon[d] to the “challenge of the West with much...speed and...success,” China, a nation deeply sheltered in its own historical continuities, had much more difficulty swallowing the bitter pill of modernity.⁵¹ For Fairbank and Reischauer, the ultimate cost of imperialism was determined more by a nation’s preparedness for change than by the gratuitous cruelties of Western imperialist forces. In this way, the two Harvard China scholars endorsed the notion of a singular, Westernized path to modernity.

In studying Fairbank and Reischauer’s use of Modernization Theory, one can see just how careful these scholars are to remain politically inoffensive to their readership. Fairbank and Reischauer characterize modernization as an historically inevitable force. They are clear to acknowledge the violent suffering of the Chinese people but do not go as far as to confront the realities of this violence head-on. Instead, Fairbank and Reischauer approach their Chinese history from a macro-level, using the language of historical determinism to avoid emotional or political baggage. Fairbank and Reischauer effectively condemn individual acts of imperialist domination without accusing the West of causing long term geopolitical damage. Fairbank and Reischauer abstract the violence of imperialism, not as a set of concrete decisions made by historical actors, but as an unfortunate clash between traditional and modernizing worlds. Perhaps most importantly, Fairbank and Reischauer resist the temptation to relate their historical studies to contemporary political issues. Imperialism, they suggest, is something of the past, to be studied only for history’s sake.

In this way, Fairbank and Reischauer’s work serve as excellent examples of the type of China scholarship produced in the aftermath of the McCarran hearings. In the 1960’s it was

⁵¹ Fairbank, Reischauer, and Craig, xix.

precisely this academic approach, using a birds-eye-view to avoid getting mired in the political, that would alienate the young left-wing China scholars of the CCAS, skeptical of objectivity and angry with their liberal predecessors for succumbing to government intimidation.

Peck versus Fairbank: Oedipal Conflict

In October 1969, James Peck, a graduate student in the East Asian Studies Department at Harvard, unleashed the first direct attack on the elder sages of liberal American China scholarship. Having already been at Harvard for three years, Peck felt increasingly frustrated with the timidity of his professors, many of whom, he reflects, acknowledged the Vietnam War to be a “costly mistake” and yet made little effort to change their scholarly approaches, stuck in a “mind-numbing hostility” towards intellectual reorientation.⁵² Peck’s article, “The Roots of Rhetoric: The Professional Ideology of America’s China Watchers,” provided a withering critique of recent scholarship on China, challenging the merits of Modernization Theory and the objective method and calling for an altogether new academic approach.

Most controversial was Peck’s condemnation of John Fairbank and Edwin Reischauer’s Modernization Theory. For Peck, Modernization Theory was not a rigorous academic model based on the method of objectivity, but a masked justification of Western imperialism and the domination of Asian nation-states. Peck insists that the notion of an inevitable wave of technological and scientific change had freed Western powers from taking full responsibility for the consequences of their foreign interference. China watchers like Fairbank and Reischauer, Peck argues, have traditionally viewed the West as a force of “creative destruction,” bringing

⁵² James Peck, *Washington’s China: The National Security World, the Cold War, and the Origins of Globalism* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 2.

about “a painful but unavoidable step” in the greater movement towards modernity. Peck insists that by constructing this role for the West, as an agent of paternal, tough-love, the U.S. continues to explain away the devastating effects of American occupation of Asian nation-states. This attempt to place American dominance abroad within a larger historical narrative of inevitable progress towards modernity provides a “psychologically comforting rationalization of America’s imperial role and its consequences.”⁵³ And, in emphasizing the internal, domestic factors that cause a nation to suffer under imperial rule, Modernization Theory fails to confront the horrors of true victimization. Indeed, for Peck there is little difference between liberal-minded modernization theorists and outright supporters of governmental policy. Modernization Theory, he argues, serves not just as a tool for historical understanding, but also as an “ideological weapon to fight the cultural cold war” and even as a justification for the occupation of Vietnam.⁵⁴ In this way, unlike Fairbank and Reischauer, Peck refuses to believe that scholarly thought can be separated from contemporary politics.

Peck argues that by adopting a supposedly objective approach, liberal China scholars have unwittingly helped provide the intellectual framework within which the American imperialist political machine continues to operate. The China expert, concerned too much with the risks of taking political sides, has fundamentally failed to understand the Chinese Communist perspective. While Peck admits that “[a]ssuredly, few American China specialists saw themselves as instruments...of the American government,” their inability to empathize with the Chinese point-of-view amounts to an endorsement of “significant portions of the official definition of reality.” Rather than consider the actual perspectives which shape revolutionary

⁵³ Jim Peck, “The Roots of Rhetoric: The Professional Ideology of America’s China Watchers.” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 1969, 63.

⁵⁴ Peck, 64.

Marxism, China scholars have chosen to operate from an intellectual distance, explaining why its teachings are “emotionally satisfying to the Chinese.”⁵⁵ This inability to seriously consider the purpose and value of Communism has made China scholars prejudiced against any mode of political participation that does not coincide with American interests.

According to Paul Cohen, an expert on American historiography of China, Peck’s article “sent shock waves through the China field.” Peck, Cohen recalls, wrote with a “trenchant, hard-hitting style,” and there was even a “titillating aspect in that the author, a youthful graduate student... was taking on, in mass, the elders of the profession.” Cohen goes as far as to suggest that Peck’s article created an almost McCarthyist-like paranoia, but with a new set of criteria for determining which China scholars would be deemed acceptable or unacceptable:

[B]ecause of the way in which Peck’s attack was structured, it inevitably resulted in a degree of nervous self-examination among his readership. Peck left the boundaries of the “China-watchers” cohort he was bringing under scrutiny vague and undefined, causing the unnamed... to wonder uneasily whether we had been consigned to the elect or the damned.⁵⁶

Here, Cohen’s language echoes the same fear and instability felt by liberal China scholars in the aftermath of Chiang Kai-Shek’s defeat and the ensuing interrogation of the IPR.

As China scholars scrambled to define their position relative to Peck’s treatise, the divisions in the field became much more defined, separating professors from students and liberal scholars from radical leftists. The younger generation of scholars, drawn to anti-imperialist language as a way of articulating their own opposition to the Vietnam War, sided with Peck and

⁵⁵ Peck, 63.

⁵⁶ Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 105.

the CCAS, while the older generation, represented by the “granddaddy of us all,” John K. Fairbank, worked to defend their own scholarly legacy.⁵⁷

This hardening of scholarly lines was reflected in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. In an issue dedicated entirely to the debate between anti-imperialism and Modernization Theory, chief editor of the *Bulletin* Mark Selden, a PH. D. student at Yale, characterized his organization as a “direct challenge to the intellectual... hegemony of a whole group of scholars... most notably... from Harvard University.”⁵⁸ Though the publication created a space for the defense of Modernization Theory, the format of these discussions served more often to reinforce rather than bridge intellectual divides, casting Peck and Fairbank in a heated debate and placing anti-imperialist attacks in juxtaposition against modernization defenses.

Indeed, in Fairbank’s critique of Peck, he suggests that embedded in the young sociologist’s argument was a type of “black and white” thinking that had led to this new bifurcation of the China field.⁵⁹ According to Fairbank, Peck’s argument was based on “general guilt over Vietnam,” of which his “generation unfortunately suffers” (54). These “moral sentiments” were justified, Fairbank admits, but should not serve as the foundation for a new historical approach. For Fairbank, to allow guilt, anger, or any other emotion to influence one’s work was unscholarly and ultimately dangerous. This youthful frustration over imperialism and the Vietnam War had caused Peck’s generation to move too far in the opposite direction, over-identifying with the Chinese revolutionary cause. “The fact that ‘American imperialism’ [had] very undesirable features” he writes, [did] not mean that ‘communism’ or ‘revolutionary Marxism’ did not have very undesirable features too.” Here, Fairbank implies that Peck, in

⁵⁷ Interview with Professor Vera Schwarcz. 10 January 2012. Nathan Karnovsky.

⁵⁸ Mark Selden. “Introduction to Special Section on Imperialism in China.” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Vol. 4, No. 4, 1972. 2.

⁵⁹ John Fairbank and Jim Peck, “An Exchange,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Vol. 2, No. 3, 1970, 51.

jumping to the opposite extreme, remained as blind to Chinese lived realities as the staunchest supporter of American imperialism.⁶⁰ In addition, Fairbank argued, the intensity of Peck's anti-imperialism had caused him to unfairly dismiss all of his liberal predecessors as agents of governmental interest. Peck had sloppily "lumped together...all of the China specialists" with the American government. "If Mr. Peck persists in bedding them together," Fairbank writes, "he can be sure they will continue to dream different dreams."⁶¹

As Fairbank suggests, this new polarization in liberal China scholarship overshadowed what was actually a much more complex reality. Even the main representatives of the two ideological camps, Peck and Fairbank, shared much more in common than was ever acknowledged. As Paul Cohen points out, Peck, despite his disdain for the Harvard approach, could not escape some of the basic assumptions about China on which it was based. Like Fairbank and others, Peck caricatures pre-imperialist China as fundamentally stagnant. While for the Modernizationists, China's history was largely a monotonous tale of dynasty succeeding dynasty, for Peck, it was a story of constant violent peasant revolts. Either way, Cohen argues, both parties assume that "only with the intrusion of the nineteenth-century West" does true, dynamic change "becom[e] a genuine possibility in China" (106-107). Similarly, Cohen echoes Fairbank's critique of Peck, arguing that in scolding the older generation of scholars for propping up American political interests and the oppressive foreign policy of the West, Peck too fails to look closely at Chinese life as it existed on the ground. Peck, in rejecting internal factors as a possible explanation for Chinese suffering under imperialism, is equally Americocentric, interested only in "change resulting directly or indirectly from the Western impact."⁶²

⁶⁰ Cohen, 105-110.

⁶¹ Fairbank and Peck, 53.

⁶² Cohen, 106-110.

On the other hand, John Fairbank's legacy as a progressive, left-wing academic seems to have been forgotten during this period of tension and divisiveness. The fact that Fairbank was an active member of the IPR and even testified in front of McCarran's Subcommittee on behalf of Owen Lattimore was subverted by a more radical narrative casting the scholar as a defender of the old academic guard. Fairbank was much more flexible in his views than was recognized at the time. In fact, Fairbank ultimately came out in favor of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. By 1972, Fairbank had published an article in *Foreign Affairs* stating that "[t]he Maoist Revolution is on the whole the best thing that has happened to the Chinese people in many centuries. At least, most Chinese seem now to believe so, and it will be hard to prove otherwise." Ironically, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, Fairbank became one of Simon Leys' central targets, accused along with CCAS members like Edward Friedman and outspoken Cultural Revolution supporter Han Suyin of "lazy...blissful ignorance."⁶³

Despite these intellectual overlaps, the antagonisms produced by Peck's article were strong enough to galvanize an uncompromising academic culture in which moderation gave way to youthful anger. According to Vera Schwarcz, then a graduate student at Stanford and a founding member of the CCAS, it was only in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the birth of the Reform period in China that many young academics were able to reestablish working, respectful relationships with the older generation of scholars. Schwarcz describes how, in meeting Fairbank on her 1979 trip to China, she came to regret all that she and her young colleagues had said in disparagement of such an open-minded academic:

There were a number of attacks against Fairbank that, I think, really stick out in my mind as examples of willful misunderstanding, not only of China but of the

⁶³ Simon Leys, *The Burning Forest: Essays on Chinese Culture and Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986), 195.

character of the people who were mentoring us...I remember very clearly...at dinner I remember how extremely appreciative he was about how much we were learning about the situation in China...and I said to myself 'oh my God!' I had been in China for four months and he had been in China for decades...He had been to the Ming Tombs, I had never been to the Ming Tombs! He had deep friendships with Chinese, we had been set up with Chinese guides. So it was that moment in 1979 when I said 'Whoah!...but by that time all the words had been spoken.'⁶⁴

Here, Schwarcz hints at the intensity with which academics like Fairbank were demonized. She also suggests that ire directed at such figures was based on their privileged, established positions as instructors of the field. Once the tensions produced by the Cultural Revolution had subsided, Fairbank's role as mentor was much more digestible to these previously enraged students of China.

Conclusion:

With the loss of China to Communism came a wave of hostility directed at liberal American China scholars who had become increasingly involved in the complications of American foreign policy. These attacks, in the form of the McCarran Hearings, pushed these academics back up into their ivory towers where they would attempt to study China from a politically neutral perspective. But in the contentious period of the late 1960s, young leftist China scholars provided an Oedipal challenge to their own professors, insisting that "objectivity" was just another word for complacency or, even worse, cooperation and that this political passivity had allowed for the continuation of an imperialistic foreign policy. In this way, Peck and his fellow members of the CCAS demanded the creation of a radically new approach to the study of China. As we will see, the Cultural Revolution served as a prop for the articulation and

⁶⁴ Interview with Professor Vera Schwarcz. 10 January 2012. Nathan Karnovsky.

enhancement of this new approach, or as Vera Schwarcz put it, “an intellectual football” to be kicked around in defiance of the previous liberal order.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Interview with Professor Vera Schwarcz.

The Birth of the CCAS

Formation

By 1965, Mao Zedong had taken the first steps towards initiating the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Disturbed by the growing emphasis on expertise-driven development, Mao sought to restrengthen the Chinese commitment to revolutionary, egalitarian values by provoking an attack on the Communist Party leadership. For Mao, revisionism and the temptations of capitalism threatened to undermine all that he had done so much to create. In order for socialism to flourish, the Chinese people needed to engage in continual revolution and class-based struggle.

Mao began this onslaught with a highly coordinated attack on Professor Wu Han of Tsinghua University. Professor Wu had written a play titled *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, a subtle critique of the Chairman's agricultural policies during the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s. Wu's work was condemned by Mao's political allies as heresy, and those who associated with or defended the Professor were cast into political exile. This was the first of many early moves by Mao and his supporters against supposed revisionists, including Yang Shangkun, the director of the party center's General Office, and General Luo Ruiqing, the People's Liberation Army Chief of Staff. By spring of 1966, Mao had begun a full-scale assault on the Beijing Party establishment, announcing in a policy directive that members of the bourgeoisie had infiltrated the Party.⁶⁶ Mao's call for renewed revolution gained the support of many disaffected Chinese, particularly angry students who quickly formed the glorified Red Guard troops. These students, eager to relive the revolutionary experiences of their parents, attacked "old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits" and reaffirmed the supremacy of the proletarian blood line, harassing,

⁶⁶ Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 122.

torturing and killing those who were considered lacking in commitment to revolutionary principles.⁶⁷

But initially in the field of American China studies, it was not so much the Cultural Revolution but the war in Vietnam that would inspire the creation of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. By 1967, America had ground troops in Vietnam for two years, and what once looked like a “war for victory” had become a “war of attrition.” As they watched news of mass death and American atrocities, American students were faced with the very real threat of being drafted. At universities throughout the country, students were staging teach-ins and protests against the American political and academic establishment.⁶⁸

Indeed, for graduate students Edward Friedman and Mark Selden, two of the founders of the CCAS, conflict over the Vietnam War proved inspirational in the reconceptualization of their own approach to the study of China. In the mid-1960s, Friedman, a student of John K. Fairbank at Harvard’s East Asian Research Center, and Selden, a PH.D. candidate at Yale, both studied abroad in Taiwan.⁶⁹ There, Friedman and Selden studied Chinese with other young American graduate students, a number of whom helped them form the “nucleus” of the CCAS. For these young scholars, the Vietnam War provided an exciting new framework within which to study China. According to Selden, the War was a “decisive moment defining” all of “Asian scholarship,” particularly the research he “was doing at the time on the Chinese revolution. “The war raised many issues I had just engaged,” Selden writes, “and it evoked for me comparisons

⁶⁷ Karl, 127.

⁶⁸ John Robert Greene, *America in the Sixties* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 127.

⁶⁹ Richard C. Kagan, “The Education of Edward Friedman,”
http://webapp.mcis.utoronto.ca/ai/pdfdoc/richard_kagan_brief.pdf,2.

between U.S. war making in Vietnam and Japanese war making in China.”⁷⁰ Similarly, for Friedman, the War served as another example of the same kind of American imperialism that had been perpetrated against China since the middle of the 19th century. From Taiwan, Friedman, Selden and about twenty other young graduate students and professors drafted a letter to the Association for Asian Studies, demanding that the Association “expand its topics... and allow for political discussion” of the Vietnam War.⁷¹ And upon their return to the States, Friedman and Selden engaged in campus-based activism against the war, taking part in draft-card burnings and mobilizing students in their respective Asian studies departments.

Friedman and Selden’s activism culminated in the CCAS’ birth at the 1968 Vietnam Caucus in Philadelphia. Frustrated with the apolitical AAS and its unwillingness to discuss the War, East Asian Studies students, largely from Harvard, organized the Caucus as a left-wing and openly politicized alternative to the AAS’ twentieth annual convention. Of the 1200 scholars and faculty gathered in Philadelphia, four-hundred chose to take part only in the Caucus, discussing the outrages of the Vietnam War and the complicity of East Asian scholars in allowing for the continuation of imperialist and oppressive governmental policy.⁷² The Caucus brought together a wide range of groups, from liberal critics of U.S. foreign policy, to Quaker organizations, to radical Marxists and Maoists.⁷³ But China scholars in particular mobilized around the Caucus. According to Selden, the profound lack of scholarship on Vietnam often allowed China scholars to step into the breach.⁷⁴ In this way, Vietnam came to symbolize, for scholars like Selden and Friedman, all that was wrong with China studies. Indeed, in reflecting

⁷⁰ Tani E. Barlow, “Responsibility and Politics: An Interview with Mark Selden,” *Positions* 12:1 (Duke University Press, 2004), 252.

⁷¹ Kagan, 4.

⁷² Nancy Hodes, “Expert Dissent,” *The Harvard Crimson*, April 17, 1968, News Section.

⁷³ Interview with Edward Friedman, February 8, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

⁷⁴ Interview with Mark Selden, February 9, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

on the legacy of the CCAS, Edward Friedman recalls the emotional rehabilitation of China scholar Owen Lattimore as the seminal moment for him in realizing the meaning behind this new intellectual and political project:

I thought the best moment of the organization...If you think of the impact of the organization as a struggle against McCarthyism and the turning away from good scholarship was when Owen Lattimore came to the meeting...and it was in a ballroom that had...three billion seats in it...and everybody stood up and applauded and welcomed him home. And I think it was a feeling that we weren't going to go down that road again...That was the most hopeful moment that certainly had the deepest impact on me.⁷⁵

Here, Friedman suggests that what began as a movement in response to the immediate outrages of Vietnam quickly became linked to the historical failures of China scholarship and the injustices of the McCarthy/McCarran era. At the CCAS' follow-up conference in Boston, Friedman played a crucial role in negotiating and drafting a Statement of Purpose reflecting the organization's commitment to integrity and morality in scholarship. No longer would Asia scholars retreat from taking "responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession" or maintain a "parochial cultural perspective" in favor of "selfish interests." Instead, the CCAS would commit itself to the development of a more "knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies," confronting issues of "poverty, oppression, and imperialism from a "humane" perspective."⁷⁶

After these initial efforts, Friedman, Selden and others in the China field continued to play significant roles in the life of the new organization. At Harvard, Friedman and Selden helped found the graduate student newsletter that eventually became the CCAS' much larger scholarly publication, the *Bulletin*. The two friends were also instrumental in organizing a 1968

⁷⁵ Interview with Edward Friedman.

⁷⁶ "CCAS Statement of Purpose," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1968.

summer seminar at Harvard, bringing together graduate students and younger faculty from the nation's various East Asian Studies centers to discuss their new scholarly approach.

Despite the deep connections Friedman, Selden and their colleagues from Taiwan saw between the anti-war activism of the CCAS and their own study of China, initially the Cultural Revolution, though in full bloom, was not a central issue. Ultimately, for scholars like Friedman, the new scholarship produced by the CCAS was written with the specific intent of effecting change in American politics and academia rather than bringing about the reconsideration of Mao or the Communist Party: "I think I came out of a foreign policy concern and a desire that I'd like my country to do better and for me that was very distinct from what I thought about China or Mao or anything like that."⁷⁷ Indeed, Friedman was quick to label himself as a "progressive liberal with strong civil liberties and human rights commitment," strongly opposed to any form of authoritarianism or "coercive leadership."⁷⁸ Though from its outset, the CCAS included members of the radical left excited at the possibilities of the Cultural Revolution, at its formation the organization was primarily led by those concerned with the historical study of Asia and the moral positioning of the United States.

Self-Criticism

With Friedman and Selden taking the lead, many CCAS China scholars underwent a radical change in their approach to the study of China, engaging in rigorous self-critique. The Statement of Purpose provided the first road map in this intellectual reorientation, stating that in order to be "students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them." Here,

⁷⁷ Interview with Edward Friedman.

⁷⁸ Kagan, 3-4.

Friedman and his colleagues suggest that China studies should no longer focus strictly on the intermediary space of China-U.S. relations, but instead must struggle to interrogate the American prejudices that prevent us from looking at China as a nation with its own "cultural integrity." China scholars could not effectively study China without first undergoing a "self-conscious, probing, and uncompromising re-examination" of their "individual lives" and the way in which their own cultural biases have blinded them to Chinese realities.⁷⁹ According to Mark Selden, the China scholar was full of "fundamentally flawed images of both Asia and the United States, requiring the "transform[ation]" not only of scholarship and politics but of "ourselves." The China scholar would have to reconsider his or her previous positions on China, tracing back these misunderstandings to their roots.⁸⁰

Inspired by the 1968 summer conference at Harvard and the possibilities of this new, self-critical approach, Selden and Friedman edited the volume *America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asia-American Relations*. For Selden and Friedman, the project of the book was to combat "cultural chauvinism," by displaying an openness to "learning...from Asian peoples."⁸¹ Rather than remaining "prisoners of the concepts and categories of our thinking about China," the volume's contributors struggled to "treat the people they study as subject, not object."⁸² This open-minded approach would create the potential for the personal and political transformation of the China scholar. Friedman and Selden suggest that this process would, in a sense, give American China scholars the gift of sight, removing "the optical instruments which distort our vision" of the Chinese nation.⁸³ A willingness on the part of the individual scholar to "learn and

⁷⁹ Leigh Kagan, "A Statement of Directions," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1968, 1.

⁸⁰ Barlow, 252.

⁸¹ Edward Friedman and Mark Selden, *America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations*, ed. Edward Friedman and Mark Selden et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1969), vi.

⁸² Friedman and Selden, xvi.

⁸³ Friedman and Selden, xviii.

be changed by interaction with the subject” would create the potential for a much more empathetic and peaceful international community: “[W]herever human beings struggle to overcome established limits, there will be much creativity and instruction for all mankind.”⁸⁴ In this way, the first step for CCAS Scholars towards enlightenment was to enter into a state of personal questioning and self-doubt.

Within *America's Asia*, two founding members of the CCAS, Leigh and Richard Kagan, revealed high school textbooks to be a major source of American prejudice towards China. The title of their essay “Oh Say, *Can You See?* American Cultural Blindness on China” plays on Friedman and Selden’s notion of vision, reinforcing the idea that even our childhood biases prevent us from seeing China for what it is. In examining China as it is presented in high school textbooks, the Kagans show how deeply ingrained our misunderstandings of China really are. The authors suggest that from a young age, American boys and girls are taught a history of China that inculcates “an American strategy of domination.”⁸⁵ These textbooks, the Kagans argue, have helped to extend the “Great Wall...from the northern slopes of China...into the minds of men,” making it “impossible for us to see human beings on the other side” and “perpetuating stereotypes of them and of ourselves.”⁸⁶ Here, Leigh and Richard Kagan suggest that for China scholars to liberate themselves from cultural blindness requires much more than just a reexamination of the scholarly cannon. China scholars must delve further back into their pasts, questioning the basic process of social reproduction that makes them American.

⁸⁴ Friedman and Selden, xv.

⁸⁵ Leigh and Richard Kagan, “Oh Say, Can You See? American Cultural Blindness on China,” in *America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations*, ed. Edward Friedman and Mark Selden et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1969), 3.

⁸⁶ Leigh and Richard Kagan, 36.

In Edward Friedman's contribution to the volume, "Problems in Dealing with an Irrational Power," he uses the history of the Korean War to challenge perceptions of the Chinese as an irrational people and to highlight for Americans their own illogical behavior. Friedman argues that, in fact, the Chinese perceive America much more clearly than we as Americans perceive China or ourselves. The Chinese, he writes, "were good American-ologists" who "long ago saw clearly, where... Americans are still confused." Americans, caught up in the twisted logic of national security, "cannot see" the implications of their own aggression and conclude that the Chinese must be the "blind" ones. In this way, Americans ultimately end up "ascrib[ing] to the psyche of Chinese leaders an irrationality which is actually and institutionally American." Here, Friedman adheres closely to the CCAS' new, self-critical approach, proving that America's own lack of self-reflection leads to dangerous mischaracterizations of the Chinese.

Though neither the Kagans nor Friedman openly endorse the Chinese Cultural Revolution, in criticizing American prejudice, they exhibit an open-mindedness that, at the very least, opens the door to a discussion of the possible benefits of violent revolution and political and cultural upheaval. Indeed, the Kagans critique the textbook history of China as inherently biased against a movement like the Cultural Revolution. They criticize textbooks for comparing the Cultural Revolution to the Legalist Ch'in Emperor's "tyrannical rule that was soon swept away in civil war." The Kagans argue that it is unfair to caricature the Communists as the modern manifestation of the "despotic and barbarian" Legalists. Doing so, they insist, "erects a framework within which it is impossible to comprehend the phenomenon of violent change in China."⁸⁷ The Kagans are also critical of the high school textbook's biases in favor of technological over moral or political progress. While in the heat of the Cultural Revolution, the

⁸⁷ Leigh and Richard Kagan, 8.

Chinese were interested more in the “maintenance of political commitment and...moral concepts” over “technological progress,” American textbooks granted “no validity” to these values, teaching students instead that only “[t]echnology lights the way, releasing us from fear and from moral concerns.”⁸⁸ Here, according to the Kagans, high school textbooks have limited the framework within which American students can understand China. Though in America, there has always been intelligent debate on the true “nature of human progress,” the study of China allows for no such discourse, and thus any value that the Cultural Revolution might have goes unappreciated. In defending the possibility of violent change and the value of political and moral progress, the Kagans demand that the Cultural Revolution be judged on its own terms, outside the parameters of the cultural “Great Wall.”

Similarly, Friedman’s portrayal of Chinese leadership as rational refutes the common critique of the Cultural Revolution as purposeless chaos. Friedman himself sees this connection, predicting that the same misguided, prejudiced American polity will inevitably label the “upheavals of the Cultural Revolution” as “irrationality piled on humanity...backward, irrational, immature, and underdeveloped.”⁸⁹ Here, Friedman does not insert any personal opinion about the Cultural Revolution’s impact, but seeks to preemptively strike down the arguments of those he imagines to be opposed to it for all the wrong reasons. Like the Kagans, Friedman may not believe in the Cultural Revolution itself but passionately defends its right to a fair trial in the eyes of the American public. In this sense, though in retrospect Friedman insists that Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution had very little influence on his intellectual world-view, he fails to acknowledge the power of his own work in demanding the reconsideration of the Cultural

⁸⁸ Leigh and Richard Kagan, 29-30.

⁸⁹ Friedman and Selden, xvi.

Revolution. Indeed, Friedman's self-critical approach serves as a more moderate example of the type of scholarship that would ultimately justify the Cultural Revolution and its excesses.

Radical Identification

In 1970, Richard Pfeffer, Professor at The Johns Hopkins University and a former graduate student at Harvard, enraged by the outrages of the Vietnam War, produced one of the first articles for the *Bulletin* in outright support of the Cultural Revolution. Pfeffer's piece, "Revolution and Rule: Where Do We Go From Here?," signaled the emergence of a more outspoken Maoist contingent within the CCAS. Pfeffer took the model of self-criticism, as articulated in the Statement of Purpose, to a new extreme, demanding the absolute "humility" of the China scholar. Pfeffer argues that the China scholar had time and time again imposed his own vision of "normalcy" onto China, preventing us from understanding Maoist policies in anything but "arrogantly pejorative" terms. From an American perspective, Pfeffer claims, the academic studying China is like a "Martian attempt[ing] to describe two people making love." "Without understanding the reproductive function of sex on earth," he writes, "nor the tradition of romantic love...the Martian might characterize love making in terms of rising temperatures, violent motion, moans and groans, and orgasms." In the very same way, Pfeffer concludes, the American China scholar has failed to understand the internal logic guiding the upheavals of China's continuing revolution.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Richard Pfeffer, "Revolution and Rule: Where Do We Go From Here?" *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 2, No. 3, April-July 1970, 92.

By using this extraterrestrial metaphor, Pfeffer goes a step further than Friedman, Selden, or the Kagans in questioning the American scholar's ability to understand the realities of life in China. For Pfeffer, China scholars must do more than just remove the biases or "optical instruments" obscuring clear vision of China. To truly understand China, the scholar must struggle to adopt a Chinese perspective, relinquishing all critical judgment and acknowledging that the inner workings of China can never be fully comprehended by maintaining an alien relationship to the country. Furthermore, in comparing the Chinese Revolution to the act of love, Pfeffer suggests that Maoism can never be understood unemotionally. The traditional "clinical" or "analytic" approaches will never be able to capture the essence of Chinese revolutionary politics. In this way, Pfeffer challenges his colleagues, not to see China unimpaired by American prejudice, but to acquire Chinese eyes. Indeed, throughout his essay, Pfeffer calls on his fellow China scholars to "transcend[d]... bounds," rejecting their own standards of "normalcy" in order to understand the "destiny" and "extra-cyclical purpose" behind the otherwise incomprehensible ups and downs of Maoist China. The China scholar should not just be self-critical, but should lose himself in a greater process of Sinification.⁹¹

Pfeffer's theoretical argument for the internal logic of Chinese revolutionary politics also allows him to take a more concrete stance in favor of the Cultural Revolution. Pfeffer criticizes his colleagues for understanding the Cultural Revolution only in administrative and economic terms, targeting Harvard's esteemed China scholar Ezra Vogel for being concerned with revolution only "insofar as [it] can be taken to be a particular mode of administration and administrative politics." Vogel, like a Martian observing intercourse, cannot appreciate the greater human drama behind the Cultural Revolution, ignoring the "revolutionary spirit, class

⁹¹ Pfeffer, 93-94.

struggle and...intense value commitment...held by those in revolt.” The American China scholar’s obsession with “keeping order” makes him inherently biased against violent, populist uprisings “as if revolutionary rule were not qualitatively different from non-revolutionary rule.” Here, Pfeffer uses the emotional and ideological commitment of the Chinese people as evidence of the Cultural Revolution’s value, refusing to believe that the movement was born simply out of “[g]ood administration and charisma” on the part of the political establishment. In this way, by portraying the Cultural Revolution as a genuine populist uprising, Pfeffer justifies its violence.⁹²

In supporting the Cultural Revolution, Pfeffer even goes as far as to adopt the logic of continual revolution as articulated by Chairman Mao. Pfeffer agrees with Vogel that the “‘objective tasks’ facing the Chinese Communists at the beginning of 1968...are ‘essentially the same’ as they are in 1970. But whereas Vogel concludes that the Cultural Revolution was ultimately counterproductive, Pfeffer believes that revolutionary politics continue to be the answer to China’s woes:

Might it not be...that the problems remain ‘essentially the same’ because...the critical problems of governance and authority are not resolvable in any short-term sense? Might it not be precisely the recurrent or persistent nature of these problems that requires a continuing revolutionary strategy to cope with them?⁹³

Here, Pfeffer echoes the rhetoric of Mao Zedong. Like Mao, Pfeffer suggests that China is threatened more by revisionism than the violence and chaos of revolution.

Pfeffer’s argument for radical identification with the Communist cause rang true to many of the CCAS’ more left-wing members. Indeed, Pfeffer’s justification of revolutionary violence served in many ways as a rearticulation of James Peck’s anti-imperialist stance. Peck, like Pfeffer, argues that revolutionary violence inherently threatens America’s sense of political

⁹² Pfeffer, 89-91.

⁹³ Pfeffer, 91.

control. “American interests,” he writes, “are incompatible with violent upheavals.” But for the oppressed masses, there is an implicit, unacknowledged violence built into the social order as it already exists. This less “obvious” form of violence is called “orderly,” when in reality this order only “reflect[s] the interests of those powerful enough to enforce their definitions upon the population.” In this way, Peck and Pfeffer both condone explicit forms of populist violence as simply a reaction to the more subtle acts of violence performed everyday by the ruling elite.⁹⁴

For Vera Schwarcz, having recently graduated from the highly politicized Stanford and teaching at Wesleyan University, the notion of radical identification became a guiding principle. As Schwarcz put it, she and her closest colleagues felt a deep desire to “see through Chinese eyes.”⁹⁵ While teaching at Wesleyan, Schwarcz went as far as to enact self-criticism sessions within the classroom. According to Sue Kaplan, a student of Schwarcz in the mid-1970s, Schwarcz held up the struggle sessions of the Chinese peasantry, described by William Hinton in his socialist-leaning *Fanshen*, as a “model” for discussing social dynamics within the classroom.⁹⁶ At the end of each class, Schwarcz would leave ten minutes for her students to reflect on that day’s lesson. Schwarcz encouraged students to criticize themselves and each other. It was expected that those students who did not speak on a given day raise their hands and explain themselves. Schwarcz tried particularly hard to break down the “barrier” between herself and the students, convincing them it was ok to speak out in criticism of her as well. In this way, Schwarcz’s experiment reveals the powerful overlap between her conception of her own

⁹⁴ Jim Peck, “The Roots of Rhetoric: The Professional Ideology of America’s China Watchers.” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Vol. 2, No.1, October-December 1969, 66.

⁹⁵ Interview with Vera Schwarcz, January 10, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky

⁹⁶ Interview with Sue Kaplan, April 1, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

role as a professor and the politics of the Cultural Revolution. Schwarcz and her students imagined themselves to be like the peasants in *Fanshen*, engaged in a Chinese utopian project.⁹⁷

This more radical interpretation of the CCAS mission, not only engaging with but openly supporting the Cultural Revolution and the Communist Party line, created conflict within the organization. This radicalism was especially alienating to Edward Friedman. While serving on the board of the *Bulletin*, Friedman would get into numerous disputes with more left-wing members over the types of articles worth publishing. Friedman and Peck in particular got into what Friedman describes as “fantastic fights,” with Peck labeling Friedman as an “apologist for evil” and Friedman criticizing Peck for being “insanely ideological.” According to Friedman, this relationship devolved into nothing less than hate, leading eventually to his departure from the organization.⁹⁸

Conclusion

While born during the peak of the Cultural Revolution, the CCAS was originally inspired more by the outrages of the Vietnam War and the type of scholarship that many believed helped to produce it. For students like Mark Selden and Edward Friedman, the goal of the organization was to reconsider the study of Asia in a way that challenged old prejudices and the political status quo. Deeply committed to the goals of the CCAS Statement of Purpose, Friedman, Selden, and their colleagues began to examine their own biases, challenging their preconceptions of China and the limits of their own American-ness. Ultimately, this process of self-critique inspired some of the more radical elements within the organization to develop an approach which

⁹⁷ Interview with Sue Kaplan.

⁹⁸ Interview with Edward Friedman.

they saw as even more sympathetic to Asian peoples. This new method insisted on the complete incomprehensibility of China from an American perspective. Only by fully identifying with the Communist cause could an American scholar prove their true empathy to the Chinese.

According to Vera Schwarcz, these CCAS members imagined themselves to be “the voices of the oppressed within the academy.”⁹⁹ It was this radically empathetic approach that provided the framework within which CCAS China scholars were able to draw attention to Maoist politics and espouse the populist, egalitarian values of the Cultural Revolution.

⁹⁹ Interview with Vera Schwarcz.

A New Battleground

China Travelers

By the late 1960s, Mao Zedong had certainly succeeded in creating “great disorder under heaven.”¹⁰⁰ The Chairman had unleashed his Red Guards throughout urban and rural China, initiating violent class-based struggle and spreading the cult of his own personality. By 1968, Mao had successfully deposed of his chief political adversaries, including the more economically-focused Liu Shaoqi, who, accused of being a capitalist, died of pneumonia while in captivity. In Shanghai, Chinese factory workers took up Mao’s call for revolution, taking over the Municipal Party Committee and replacing it with the Headquarters of the Revolutionary Revolt of Shanghai Workers. According to Rebecca Karl, by the end of the decade, “Mao had reason to feel confident. He had marginalized his enemies” and the “Party, state, and cultural apparatuses were now preponderantly staffed by Maoists.”¹⁰¹

But the Cultural Revolution, though embraced by many, had taken a devastating toll on the Chinese nation. The Red Guards wreaked havoc, subjecting innocent people to public humiliation, destroying cultural and religious property, and fighting brutally within their various factions. Attacks on politicians at all levels of government rendered the Party totally unable to provide basic services. Schools throughout the country had been shut down and hospitals were often dysfunctional. Though ultimately to his political benefit, by the late 1960s, Mao had tried to stem the chaos, calling on The People’s Liberation Army to restore order. But this effort only led to greater suffering as the army battled with Red Guards and factory workers, killing and

¹⁰⁰ Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 125.

¹⁰¹ Karl, 136.

arresting thousands of angry rebels abandoned by Mao and misled by the rhetoric of mass politics.¹⁰²

At universities throughout China, radical politics and faulty educational experimentation led to bitter, often violent conflict and the weakening of higher education. In 1968, Mao ordered a “ruthless military crackdown” on the university rebels he had once endorsed, leading to bloody conflicts between students and PLA soldiers at esteemed institutions like Peking and Qinghua University.¹⁰³ In a desperate attempt to reestablish “normalcy,” Mao ordered rebellious high school and university students to “go down” to the countryside and the factories to learn from the Chinese peasantry and proletariat. This policy helped to diffuse tensions and break up rebel groups. By the end of 1969, the most destructive years of the Cultural Revolution had been brought to a close.

Beginning in the early 1970’s, the stakes of China scholarship seemed to be raised, as China and the United States slowly began to reestablish diplomatic relations. With the Chinese on the verge of war with the Soviets, Henry Kissinger and Premier Zhou Enlai engaged in secret meetings to discuss the further improvement of China-U.S. relations. The first true “breakthrough” came in April of 1971 when the U.S. Ping Pong team was invited to China to compete against the Chinese national team.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, this was the watershed moment that eventually led to Nixon’s visit in 1972.

It was in this context that the CCAS was finally able to gain direct access to China in the summer of 1971. For years, few American scholars or journalists had been allowed inside the nation’s borders. But for the CCAS, the recent reestablishment of diplomatic relations with

¹⁰² Karl, 132-133.

¹⁰³ Karl, 134.

¹⁰⁴ Karl, 150.

China did not signal a larger change in American foreign policy. According to Mark Selden and Virginia Brodine in their book *Open Secret: The Kissinger-Nixon Doctrine in Asia*, the Nixon administration was still stuck in the “same old policy that led us into Indochina in the first place.” Relations with China were being restored not in the hope of “peaceful relations,” but solely for the sake of “international stability.”¹⁰⁵ It was thus the job of the CCAS to use their new access to present China and the Cultural Revolution in a new light, unobstructed by American political interests or cultural prejudices.

The CCAS trip consisted of fifteen young China scholars, largely graduate students living and working in Hong Kong. There was Ray Whitehead and his wife Rhea Whitehead, both of whom had spent the last ten years in Hong Kong and had become fluent in Cantonese. There were Chinese foreign policy buffs like Kim Woodard, a political scientist at Stanford, and Kay Ann Johnson from Wisconsin University. There was Dorothy Kehl, a native born Chinese raised in Hong Kong and educated in the United States and Susan Shirk, from Long Island, New York writing her dissertation on Chinese middle schools. Many of these scholars were intellectually drawn to the Cultural Revolution. During the trip, Ray Whitehead was in the process of writing his dissertation on the philosophy behind the Cultural Revolution. Paul Levine, a twenty-four year old graduate student at Berkeley took a deep interest in the political leadership guiding the movement and Jean Garavante, an English and Spanish teacher in a Chinese neighborhood in Los Angeles, was extremely eager to “see a revolutionary society in action.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Virginia Brodine and Mark Selden, *Open Secret: The Kissinger-Nixon Doctrine in Asia* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), 20-22.

¹⁰⁶ The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, *China! Inside the People's Republic* (New York: Bantam, 1972), 3-6.

According to Mark Selden, the excitement of seeing China with their own eyes and meeting with such important political figures as Premier Zhou Enlai proved absolutely overwhelming for these young China scholars:

It was a historical moment. It was a first. It was exciting. It was new. It was sexy. And like so many China trippers in those days, people were carried away by the excitement and the show that was put on for them... it raised your self-esteem... It was rather exciting... especially for younger people... people came back and were anxious to talk about what they had seen, a new world in effect, or so they thought.¹⁰⁷

Here, Selden highlights just how groundbreaking the experience of being in China in 1970 must have felt. So few Americans had been granted access to China and its political leadership that these young and perhaps impressionable students could not help but feel an inflated sense of their own empowerment. Selden suggests that the respect and seriousness with which these students were treated made them want to see China in a positive light.

In the resulting book, *China! Inside the People's Republic*, by the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, one can sense the students' ecstasy at being in the very country they had spent years only reading about. Even the exclamation point in the title reveals the intensity of their enthusiasm as does the caption on the front cover, "The electrifying up-to-the-minute report on life in China today."¹⁰⁸ In describing the process of gaining access to China, the students do not shy away from expressing their excitement. Whereas just a few weeks before their trip they had operated under the "basic assumption...that [they] would never see firsthand what [they] might spend [their] lives studying," abruptly this presumption was "overturned."¹⁰⁹ The students even go as far as to acknowledge the blinding and absolutely pervasive nature of their joy: "We were in China! There could have been brass bands to welcome us and we never

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Mark Selden, February 9, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

¹⁰⁸ *China! Inside the People's Republic* (New York: Bantam, 1972)

¹⁰⁹ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 7.

would have noticed; the thrill of simply thinking ‘I’m in China’ absorbed us all.”¹¹⁰ Here, within the first few pages of the book, the students admit that their elation did indeed color their perception of the country.

But beyond their pure excitement, these students, as younger more radical members of the CCAS, were particularly inclined to see China in only the most positive terms. According to Selden, the CCAS students who went to China in 1971 were largely on the “end of the spectrum” that included scholars like Richard Pfeffer, Jim Peck, and Vera Schwarcz.¹¹¹ Like these scholars, the students sought to radically identify with the Chinese people and understand China on what they believed to be exclusively Chinese terms. Indeed, Vera Schwarcz describes her own 1970’s trip to China as both an exciting adventure and an experiment in this new brand of scholarship:

We were seeking Chinese eyes. We wanted to see China as it was from within... We were so touched. Any cab driver who talked to us, that was the Chinese eyes! Every conversation we had was this—huh!—snippet of reality that we had somehow managed to capture.¹¹²

Here, Schwarcz describes her trip as a constant search for authentic Chinese perspectives. As Richard Pfeffer prescribes, Schwarcz attempts to transcend bounds by entering into a Chinese world view. Furthermore, her emotional reaction, like the excitement of the CCAS graduate students, echoes Pfeffer’s argument that China cannot be studied dispassionately.

In *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, these young CCAS members describe their own desire to understand and adopt the Chinese perspective. The students assume that their preconceptions of China must be totally misinformed and seek to transform themselves into more sympathetic and less Americanized participants in the Communist project. Through their

¹¹⁰ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 8-9.

¹¹¹ Interview with Mark Selden, February 9, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

¹¹² Interview with Vera Schwarcz, January 10, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

direct experience of China, the students come to realize that the American perspective has been “grossly misinformed by the press and politicians of the last two decades.” Over the course of a “month of travel,” the students write, “we discovered that—despite all our study of China—we still had, deeply ingrained, many of the American stereotypes.”¹¹³ Here, the students echo the language of the CCAS Statement of Purpose and the CCAS project of self-criticism. It is as if their trip to China has become a process of educational purification. The students insist that with the opportunity to finally see China for themselves, it is their responsibility to disassociate the “‘reality’ [they] had studied” in American universities from authentic Chinese truths.¹¹⁴

In an effort to adopt Chinese eyes, the students try to actively participate in Chinese life. The students struggle to perform tasks in the factories and villages they visit. At the Hongqiao Commune, they pressure the peasants into allowing them to “pick a few rows of tomatoes.”¹¹⁵ At the Deaf-Mute school in Canton, Tony Garavante, a graduate student at UCLA, agrees enthusiastically to try traditional Chinese acupuncture. Eager to establish a role for themselves in the larger Chinese Revolutionary movement, the students attempt to frame their trip as part of a greater “struggle to change America’s mind about Asia.” In this way, the students imagine themselves to be aligned with the Communist cause, “us[ing] every weapon [they] have” to combat American ignorance and even adopting the Maoist language of voluntarism to characterize their efforts: “If all of this sounds like an invasion of young Asia experts...we are...as we told Premier Chou En-Lai...very determined!”¹¹⁶ Here, the students reveal a desire to be more than just objective observers. In embracing the life style and espousing the virtues of the Chinese nation, the students fantasize that they too can become a part of Chinese society.

¹¹³ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 2.

¹¹⁴ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 4.

¹¹⁵ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 11.

¹¹⁶ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 3.

In 1974, Orville Schell, a PH. D. student at the University of California, Berkeley, and a frequent contributor to the *Bulletin*, used a similar participatory approach in an attempt to assimilate with the Chinese people. Schell arranges to work on a farm in the Taihang Mountains of Shansi Province, adopting the peasant life-style and work ethic. Like the peasants, Schell lives in a cave and sleeps on a *k'ang*. He joins a work team and spends "sunrise" to "sunset" "pick[ing] up stones and load[ing] them into baskets."¹¹⁷ In this way, Schell is as interested in his own transformation as he is in China itself. Indeed, in Shanghai, Schell goes as far as to alter his physical appearance, going to a State-owned barbershop. Whereas when Schell enters, he describes himself as an "inordinately hairy foreigner," by the time he leaves, with a new "springy puffed-up" Chinese hairstyle, he believes himself to be fundamentally changed. "I am transformed," he declares.¹¹⁸ Here, it is as though Schell imagines himself to be changed from the Pfefferian martian to an authentic Chinese citizen.

This desire to have an authentic experience of Chinese life prevented the CCAS students from acknowledging the manufactured nature of their trip. According to Simon Leys, the Cultural Revolution's most virulent critic, many American academics convinced themselves, against all evidence to the contrary, that their interactions with Chinese people and culture were both spontaneous and unique. Leys makes fun of those "academic journalists" who visit China on a "standard six-week tour" and come back claiming to know about "'real' China" when "they are in fact describing the Chinese shadow play produced for them by Maoist authorities."¹¹⁹ Indeed, according to Mark Selden, by the 1970's, the Chinese Communist Party had become

¹¹⁷ Orville Schell, *In the People's Republic: An American's First-Hand View of Living and Working in China* (New York: Random House, 1977), 204.

¹¹⁸ Schell, 83-84.

¹¹⁹ Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows* (New York: Viking, 1977), xiv-xix.

“remarkably good about putting on a show about the nature of China.”¹²⁰ Those who went on the 1971 CCAS trip, however, worked hard to defend the credibility of their experience. They point out that they were allowed to “wander off on [their] own” and go “free...without...interpreters” “whenever [they] wanted.”¹²¹ The students highlight their own role in shaping the trip itinerary and insist on referring to their tour guides as “Chinese friends.”¹²² Yet in describing the course of their trip, the students reveal just how planned their experience really was by the ever-watchful and overly-protective China Administration for Travel and Tourism (CATT). The visitors travel everywhere they go on a “special bus” and at every destination there appears to be a standard operating procedure:

We would arrive, chat for a few minutes, and then be shown into a room for a short briefing. Inevitably there were glasses of hot tea, cool, damp small towels for freshening our faces, and packs of cigarettes. These sessions were usually conducted by a ‘responsible person’...After his or her talk, we asked questions for a while, and then were given a tour of the area.”¹²³

Here, the presentation of China is so routinized that the students are even able to identify the typical amenities provided during the information sessions. The ‘responsible person’ running these meetings was presumably hand-picked by CATT to deliver a highly pre-orchestrated message. Perhaps most importantly, the students’ use of the passive voice, writing that they were “given” a tour of the area, suggests a lack of true agency in determining the structure of their trip.

Ultimately, the students’ eagerness to adapt to the Chinese way of life makes them more aware of their own cultural deficiencies and admiring of the Chinese people. In their interview with Zhou Enlai, the CCAS members criticize their own inability to do manual labor:

¹²⁰ Interview with Mark Selden.

¹²¹ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 1, 11.

¹²² *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 22.

¹²³ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 11.

Chou: Did you take part in some work at Tachai? Didn't Comrade Chen Yonggui let you do some work?

Paul Levine: We hoed a row.

Jean Garavante: They told us we'd spoil the crops. (*Laughter.*)

Chou: But you have been to the February 7 Rolling Stock Plant in Peking? And you did some work there?

Kay: We did some work in a commune in Shanghai, and we picked some tomatoes....

Kim: But we ate more than we picked.¹²⁴

Here, in front of the leader of the Communist Party, the students feel self-conscious about their attempts to become part of Chinese society. The Premier tries to give the students credit for their participation, but their feelings of inadequacy do not allow them to take the compliment.

Similarly, Orville Schell, despite his best efforts, "consider[s] [him]self to be inadequate" to the challenge of "serv[ing] China and the revolution." He admits that he is not capable of becoming a "new person" no matter how much he admires the Chinese for their self-sacrifice and their commitment to the Communist cause. No matter how hard he tries, his thoughts will forever remain "bourgeois-afflicted." In this way, Schell and the touring students take the CCAS method of self-criticism to the extreme, humbling themselves before the Chinese people.¹²⁵

In light of their shortcomings, the CCAS imagine the Chinese to be models of everything that they as Americans are not. The Chinese, they insist, are full of "vitality...enthusiasm...humor, and the tremendous commitment...to this new China."¹²⁶ An elderly peasant woman in the hospital receiving eye surgery seems to "feel no pain." She smiles at her less courageous observers, a group of "fifteen weak-stomached, impressed strangers" and tells them, "Chairman Mao has given me back my sight." And in describing the functions of

¹²⁴ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 341.

¹²⁵ Schell, 113.

¹²⁶ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 2.

the party committee, the students denounce the American system in comparison to the purity of Chinese Communism:

A Westerner viewing this open and democratic process should not make the mistake of thinking that China is following the road to New England democracy. Many of our Chinese friends simply scoffed at the Western election process, with its corruption and huge campaign contributions by special interests.¹²⁷

Here, the students insist that China is strong where America is fraught. Similarly, Orville Schell contrasts America's depravity with China's humble decency. He describes the "unmistakable air of self-consciousness" of a Western woman in a crowd of more modestly dressed Chinese, and he credits Chinese society for romanticizing the life of a "mild, sensible...kind" man like Lei Feng rather than "flashy detectives, reckless lovers, lawless gangsters and macho cowboys."¹²⁸ Schell goes so far as to engage in a process of complete self-abasement, relinquishing all critical judgment of China, characterizing such skepticism as just another product of his Americanness. Schell criticizes those who "can not allow the Chinese to become intelligible unless...[they are] flawed in ways which we have long identified as mortal and human" and attributes whatever discomforts he feels with the Chinese way of life to his own imperfections.¹²⁹ In this way, Schell and the CCAS students idealize the Chinese as pure precisely where they are defiled.

CCAS visitors imagined that the Cultural Revolution too must have been a product of China's innate moral sensibilities, displaying a strong desire to align their own journalism with the rhetoric of the movement. In their chapter on "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," the students relay a neat narrative of the Cultural Revolution as it is explained to them by Communist Party authorities. In the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, they report, China was at risk of losing its revolutionary integrity. The Cultural Revolution was an attempt to

¹²⁷ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 94.

¹²⁸ Schell, 22, 86.

¹²⁹ Schell, 81.

reclaim “the Yen-an spirit” in the face of “capitalist restoration.”¹³⁰ As the chapter progresses, the students continue to describe the movement in highly flattering terms, accepting the distinctions and classifications of the Cultural Revolution as defined by the Communist Party. After the workers’ strikes in Shanghai, the students report that two “lines were beginning to emerge,” represented by Liu Shao-ch’i’s “manipulative character of expertise” and Mao’s reliance on the “revolutionary wisdom of the masses.”¹³¹ Here, the students display a powerful willingness to believe what they are told. They do not question the motives behind the Cultural Revolution or interrogate the simplified dichotomy between Mao and Liu. Their desire to radically identify with the Chinese causes them to act as uncritical receptors of propaganda.

For these CCAS tourists, the Cultural Revolution appeared as a defense of the Chinese purity they so admired. As China began to develop politically and economically, Chairman Mao and the Chinese masses became increasingly frustrated with the “elite of lazy, aristocratic party workers” who threatened to undermine the successes of liberation. Indeed, according to the CCAS students, before the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese utopia had been in jeopardy: “Every society contains the seeds of personal selfishness, of the bureaucratic mentality, and of the desire on the part of some to dominate and rise above others... Fifteen years after liberation... The Chinese found that the revolution could be lost.”¹³² The Cultural Revolution was thus a justified attempt to reassert “revolutionary goals” by regaining the absolute commitment of the people.¹³³ “The struggle,” the CCAS visitors write, “had been for the minds of the people, to change their way of thinking.”¹³⁴ In this way, the CCAS students compare their own attempts at personal transformation to the objectives of the Cultural Revolution. Though as foreigners, the CCAS

¹³⁰ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 72-74.

¹³¹ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 73, 86.

¹³² *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 74.

¹³³ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 72.

¹³⁴ *China! Inside the People’s Republic*, 94-95.

visitors could never become full-fledged Chinese Communists, the Cultural Revolution had successfully transformed the Chinese masses back into their untainted, revolutionary selves. Thus, revolution, as a cleansing of the mind, had been an absolute necessity.

Having fully accepted the premise of the Cultural Revolution, CCAS students were willing to acknowledge the violence of the movement only as an inevitable set of exceptions to the rule. The students believe their government tour-guides, who insist that Mao himself “warned against the use of armed violence.”¹³⁵ They even make a point of reciting the highly dramatized story of Mao’s teary encounter with a violent group of Red Guards. “You have let me down,” Mao supposedly says, “and what is more, you have disappointed the workers, peasants, and soldiers of China.”¹³⁶ Though the graduate students acknowledge the killings, shootings, and bombings of the “violent summers” of 1967 and 1968, they work hard to marginalize these events. At two different points in their chapter on the Cultural Revolution, the students make precisely the same argument. On page 95, they write that in its early years, the Cultural Revolution only “culminated in physical armed violence...sporadically, and then almost exclusively in a few large cities.” Only three pages later, the students reiterate the exact same point using almost precisely the same language: “Armed violence had occurred, but had been both sporadic and limited to a few large cities.”¹³⁷ Here, the students display an almost neurotic insistence on the integrity of the movement despite its bloodshed. Though they do not go as far as Peck and Pfeffer in justifying third-world revolutionary violence, the students demand that the Cultural Revolution, as a reassertion of pure Chinese Communist values, was far too important to be sidetracked by a few unfortunate incidences.

¹³⁵ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 79.

¹³⁶ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 95.

¹³⁷ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 98.

Revolutionary Education

After its formation in 1968, the CCAS engaged in a series of rigorous assaults on the American university establishment. The CCAS targeted some of America's most elite academic institutions, including Columbia and Harvard, for maintaining corrupt relationships with the United States foreign policy apparatus. The Columbia University chapter of the CCAS published a report titled "The American Asian Studies Establishment," demanding an inquiry into the links between the government-run Foreign Areas Research Coordinating Group (FAR) and the academic Joint Committee on Contemporary China (JCCC). Columbia students objected to FAR's efforts to "integrate research being done within government bureaus" with work being done in the universities.¹³⁸ The CCAS also interrogated the financial links between think-tanks like the JCCC, "a closed, top-down organization, anti-thetical to the pluralistic spirit of open academic inquiry," and elite, tax-exempt funders like The Ford Foundation.¹³⁹ At Harvard, James Peck and the CCAS criticized the administration for jeopardizing the "intellectual freedom...radical criticism, disinterested intelligence, free speculation, and creative novelty" of the University by establishing connections with the CIA and allowing its members to train and cooperate in research projects on campus.¹⁴⁰

The CCAS' strongest attacks, however, were directed at the less renowned Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. In 1971 in Carbondale, the CCAS helped to organize a series of major demonstrations against the University's new, government-funded Center for Vietnamese Studies. CCAS members mobilized against what they saw as a "neocolonial"

¹³⁸ Columbia University CCAS, "The American Asian Studies Establishment," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Fall 1970, 93.

¹³⁹ Columbia University CCAS, "The American Asian Studies Establishment," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Fall 1970, 92.

¹⁴⁰ Jim Peck, "An Exchange: The CIA at Harvard," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 1968, 7-8.

project by organizing meetings, discussions, and conferences and “distributing educational material, and carrying out marches and demonstrations.” The CCAS also organized an international boycott of the Vietnam Center, insisting that to have any connection with the Center would be “academically or professionally ‘[un]respectable,’” and convincing a number of its professors to resign.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, these efforts proved devastating to the Vietnam Center. According to SIU’s school newspaper, *The Daily Egyptian*, by 1975 the Vietnam Center had “only \$1,000, a mailing address, an office, a book and periodicals collection and a reading room.”¹⁴²

CCAS students and professors often linked their efforts at Columbia, Harvard, and SIUC to student protests going on in Asia. In their special 1971 issue dedicated to the “OFF-AID” movement at SIUC, the *Bulletin* includes a photo of student protestors in Southern Vietnam demonstrating against the “police occupation of Saigon University.” The caption below the photograph directly links the struggles in Illinois to those in Southern Vietnam, insisting that “AID’s Public Safety Division...trains the Thieu-Ky regime’s police.”¹⁴³ Similarly, in his Master’s thesis *The Cultural Revolution at Peking University*, Victor Nee, a graduate student in the sociology department at Harvard and a strong supporter of the CCAS’ more radical approach, links the efforts of Chinese students to those of the CCAS, dedicating his book to “rebellious...teachers and students everywhere.”¹⁴⁴ CCAS member Marriane Bastid, a French Harvard student who studied abroad at Peking University from 1964 to 1966,¹⁴⁵ also attempts to align Chinese with American youth, claiming that “young Chinese intellectuals” express

¹⁴¹ Douglas Allen, “Universities and the Vietnam War: A Case Study of Successful Struggle,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 8, No. 4, October-December 1976, 2-6

¹⁴² *The Daily Egyptian*, May 9, 1975.

¹⁴³ C. Harvey Gardiner, “Academic Incompetence,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol.3, No. 2, 17.

¹⁴⁴ Victor Nee and Don Layman, *The Cultural Revolution at Peking University* (New York: Monthly Review, 1969).

¹⁴⁵ Nee and Layman, 50.

“attitudes” towards academia “not unlike...their western brothers.”¹⁴⁶ In this way, the CCAS saw their own attacks on American universities as part of a larger, international effort.

Indeed, many members of the CCAS imagined the educational reforms of the Cultural Revolution to be aligned with the goals of their own student movement. Student revolutionaries in China, like CCAS demonstrators, were fighting first and foremost against the bureaucratization of the university system. According to David Marr, an active participant in the protests at SIUC, American academia was slowly leaving “all of its goals and...ends in the hands of bureaucrats in Washington.” As a result, American universities only produce “a host of foreign area specialists who are little more than intellectual functionaries.”¹⁴⁷ Similarly, in the “OFF-AID” issue of the *Bulletin*, Nina Adams argues that the looming presence of the foreign policy apparatus has created a lack of “academic freedom” in the United States universities and ensured a “constant stream of experts who are geared” only to the “technical phase of problems.”¹⁴⁸ In *The Cultural Revolution at Peking University*, Victor Nee casts pre-Cultural Revolution academia in similar terms. Nee describes how in the late 1950’s “various rightist officials” were able to “entrench themselves in the educational...administrations” and enforce new standards in Chinese universities, raising the so-called “quality of academic life.”¹⁴⁹ At Peking University, the newly appointed president Lu P’ing sought to replace “revolutionary ambitions” and establish a “first rate institution according to Soviet and Western standards.” Ultimately, these reforms resulted in the “merging of political and intellectual elites,” the birth of

¹⁴⁶ Marianne Bastid, “Economic Necessity and Political Ideals in Educational Reform During the Cultural Revolution,” in *People’s China: Social Experimentation, Politics, Entry onto the World Scene, 1966 through 1972*, ed. David Milton, Nancy Milton, and Franz Schurmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 112.

¹⁴⁷ David Marr, “Intellectual Functionaries,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 27.

¹⁴⁸ Nina Adams, “Self-Censorship,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 31.

¹⁴⁹ Nee and Layman, 27.

the “highly skilled technocra[t],” and the loss of “revolutionary zeal.”¹⁵⁰ In this way, Nee links the Chinese to the American educational system, claiming that both have been compromised by the stagnating forces of bureaucracy.

According to the CCAS, this emphasis on expertise, in both China and in The United States, had created an intensely elitist and hierarchical atmosphere. In his article for the *Bulletin*, “What Must the University Be?,” economic historian and Vietnam anti-war activist¹⁵¹ Douglas Dowd argues that the American university had developed a thick “crust of expertise...mask[ing] the cultural and social elitism of a society of privilege.”¹⁵² Here, Dowd suggests that the American emphasis on specialization served to reinforce the upper-class monopoly on education. Columbia graduate student David Horowitz too argues that the American system of higher education only served to perpetuate class divides. “[W]ithin the pluralism of organizations in American society,” Horowitz writes, “there is also—for individuals with time, money, and access—a plurality of assumable roles. This kind of pluralism is especially available to cohesive upper class elites.” In this way, Horowitz and Dowd imply that the complexities of bureaucratized American education had obfuscated what was in fact an exclusive community of elitist power and control.¹⁵³

According to the CCAS, the pre-Cultural Revolution Chinese university was quickly becoming even more elitist than the American system. In his chapter “Elitism and the Growth of Left-Wing Opposition,” Victor Nee argues that the Westernization of Peking University inevitably gave an educational advantage to faculty members and students from “bourgeois

¹⁵⁰ Nee and Layman, 28-29.

¹⁵¹ Douglas Dowd: Economic Historian, <http://dougdown.org/>, April 3, 2012.

¹⁵²¹⁵² Douglas Dowd, “What Must the University Be?,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 87.

¹⁵³ David Horowitz, “Politics and Knowledge: An Unorthodox History of Modern Chinese Studies,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Fall 1970, 141.

backgrounds.” As traditional academic standards were raised, students became overly concerned with achieving “professional status” and “compet[ing] among themselves for elite positions.”¹⁵⁴ According to Marriane Bastid, Chinese universities had become absorbed in “cultivating an elite” and fostering a “promotion-conscious mentality.”¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, students without the “cultural and intellectual advantages” of the privileged classes were accused of “stupidity” and treated with “impatience.”¹⁵⁶ As a result, by 1956, the university had become a two category system with “mental workers” on top and “physical laborers” on the bottom.¹⁵⁷ Here, Nee and Bastid suggest that in emulating the traditional American system of education, the Chinese university had also inherited its class hierarchy.

As a result of their frustrations with American academia, CCAS members idealized the student protests and the academic reforms of the Cultural Revolution as a necessary form of upheaval. The students at universities like Peking appeared to be enacting the very changes that the CCAS hoped to bring about in the States, producing a “new age” in education and a “different university, brought about in new ways.”¹⁵⁸ While CCAS members attacked American universities for emphasizing “organization” over “values” and “structure” over “decentrali[zation]” and “divers[ity],” Mao Zedong and his student Red Guards attacked university bureaucracy, demanding the institution of a more “democratic method of teaching.”¹⁵⁹ According to the CCAS, the Cultural Revolution had made possible a series of exciting “educational experiments.”¹⁶⁰ The fact that so many schools and universities had been shut

¹⁵⁴ Nee and Layman, 31-33.

¹⁵⁵ Bastid, 111.

¹⁵⁶ Nee and Layman, 33.

¹⁵⁷ Nee and Layman, 39.

¹⁵⁸ Dowd, 88.

¹⁵⁹ Moss Roberts, “17 Million Pots of Gold,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 115. Nee and Layman, 69.

¹⁶⁰ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 208.

down in the chaos of the Revolution was, to the CCAS, only a sign of true commitment to educational reform. According to *China! Inside the People's Republic*, university life in China had been abolished from 1966 to 1970 only to make room for vigorous debates about the nature of Communist education. "Rather than rushing to reopen all the universities," the CCAS insists, the Chinese leadership wanted to ensure "thorough preparation," encouraging students and faculty to "debate, discuss, criticize the old, and then carefully redesign—before resuming classes."¹⁶¹ In comparison to the American university, so immobile and "accept[ing] of the status quo," the complete deconstruction of Chinese education represented an exhilarating alternative.¹⁶²

According to the CCAS, the Chinese, in sending students to work in fields and factories, had successfully bridged the gap between education and the concrete realities of political and daily life. While visiting the "lovely setting" of Peking University, the CCAS graduate students imagine it would be easy to "settle down into a life of complacent academic isolation." Fortunately, they report, the Cultural Revolution had shaken "the school out of its quiet life," ensuring that students no longer lived an "ivory tower existence."¹⁶³ It seemed to the CCAS graduate students that by emphasizing the importance of labor coupled with the study of Mao Zedong Thought, the Cultural Revolution had "strengthened the links between school and society." Students were expected to use their "power of analysis" to improve their "moral and mental attitudes" rather than to engage in more abstract thought.¹⁶⁴ By "working while learning and learning by doing," students had become indistinguishable from the masses, taking part in industry and agriculture. Indeed, this anti-elitist approach to education must have had a strong

¹⁶¹ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 217-218.

¹⁶² Dowd, 86.

¹⁶³ *China! Inside the People's Republic*, 217.

¹⁶⁴ Bastid, 117.

appeal to CCAS students frustrated by the “merely academic” culture of the American university.¹⁶⁵ While American universities still suffered from bookishness and the continued “gap” between “scientific achievement and man’s capacity to solve his social problems,” the Chinese appeared to be creating worker-scholars capable of aligning their studies with the needs of the Chinese people.¹⁶⁶

For the academically frustrated members of the CCAS, the Cultural Revolution also represented a departure from the strict hierarchy of traditional academia. Many in the CCAS envied Chinese students for their authority in shaping the course of their own education. Chinese students had played a direct role in the reframing of their courses and even the rewriting of their textbooks. They were allowed to “sp[eak] their minds” and challenge the academic status quo by engaging in strong critiques of the old “hierarchical system.”¹⁶⁷ By comparison, CCAS scholars felt limited by the norms of American academia and vulnerable to the whims of their more traditionally-minded professors. The lack of academic freedom in the American university meant that only inoffensive students could succeed and only more moderate work was acceptable for publication. In his essay “Politics and Knowledge: An Unorthodox History of Modern China Studies,” David Horowitz argues that that the authoritarian power of American professors made “uncredentialed” graduate students, like those in the CCAS, reluctant to produce controversial work.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Edward Friedman describes how reluctant so many of his peers were to challenge the authority of their professors: “If you could imagine standing up to your senior professors who were going sit on your committees and whose recommendation you needed to

¹⁶⁵ Allen, 14.

¹⁶⁶ Gardiner, 14.

¹⁶⁷ Nee and Layman, 39, 74.

¹⁶⁸ Horowitz, 139.

move on in life, I mean it must have been very tough for those people, a very tough situation.”¹⁶⁹

In this way, CCAS graduate students projected their own fantasies of academic rebellion onto students in Cultural Revolution China.

Though CCAS students may have objected to the connection between American government and university, in the case of the Cultural Revolution the increased overlap between political and educational leadership was considered inspirational. Whereas in the United States, government sponsorship and oversight resulted in the maintenance of the political and academic status quo, CCAS members believed the Chinese government to be a force of change and an advocate on behalf of radicalized students. Mao Zedong and the Communist Party served, in this sense, as a force against the very entropy so many CCAS scholars resented in their own universities and government. According to Douglas Dowd “what is wrong” in the United States is “not that the university is political” but that the government and society it “serves now is seen as...ugly.”¹⁷⁰ Here, Dowd suggests that the university is inevitably linked to the society that surrounds it. If that society has become morally and politically bankrupt, students should drop their books and act as Red Guards.

This idealization of Cultural Revolution educational reform and the role of the Communist Party allowed for the justification, or at least the acceptance, of revolutionary violence. In *The Cultural Revolution at Peking University*, Victor Nee, like those graduate students who visited China in 1971, works hard to trivialize the early years of Cultural Revolution violence. According to Nee, as the guiding light behind progressive educational reform, Mao Zedong’s Communist party is blameless for the ensuing campus-wide shootings

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Edward Friedman, February 8, 2012. Nathan Karnovsky.

¹⁷⁰ Dowd, 86-87.

and bombings. The bloodshed, he insists, was a product of excess "on the part of a few of the younger rebels." Here, Nee suggests that the violent cruelties at Peking University were only an extreme and aberrational form of the same "passion" that had brought about such exciting academic transformation.¹⁷¹ For Nee, the abstract academic demands of the student body were much more important than the violent daily events that took place at the university.

Conclusion

Inspired by the CCAS' more empathetic approach to the study of Asia and anxious to present the newly-opened China to the world in a positive light, CCAS graduate students came to see China as a battleground for their own academic disputes. Students traveling in China displayed an intense desire to perform their new brand of sympathetic, self-critical scholarship as well as an impenetrable willingness to identify with the Chinese Communist cause and the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, those protesting against SIUC and other American academic institutions imagined themselves to be part of a larger international struggle against scholarly elitism and bureaucracy, endorsing the upheaval and even the absolute decimation of the Chinese educational system as the courageous fulfillment of their own academic desires. In both cases, CCAS graduate students and professors chose to believe in a China that would gratify their own scholarly ambitions.

¹⁷¹ Nee and Layman, 74.

The Pfefferian Revolution

In many ways, the academic career of China scholar Richard Pfeffer embodied the larger project of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. Like so many of his colleagues in the CCAS, Pfeffer embraced self-criticism, rethinking his own scholarship and rejecting the tenets of his liberal education. And like his fellow China scholars, he used the Cultural Revolution as a new window through which to understand his own dissatisfactions with American academic and political life. But unlike many of his colleagues who went on to successful careers in the American academy, Pfeffer ultimately fell victim to his own radicalism. Indeed, in his own quest for tenure, Edward Friedman recalls being advised to moderate his political views.¹⁷² But this was something Pfeffer time and again refused to do.

Pfeffer's Radicalization

As was the case with many in the CCAS, Pfeffer's career in China studies began at Harvard. In the early 1960s, Pfeffer first attended Harvard Law school and then entered into the East Asian Research Center as a graduate student in political science. Here, Pfeffer had the opportunity to study under many of the giants of the China field, including John K. Fairbank, Barrington Moore, Benjamin I. Schwartz, Ezra Vogel, and Samuel P. Huntington. Pfeffer's greatest mentor, however, was law Professor Jerome A. Cohen, founder of the school's East Asia Legal Studies Association and an expert on Chinese criminal law.¹⁷³ With Cohen's guidance,

¹⁷² Richard C. Kagan, "The Education of Edward Friedman," http://webapp.mcis.utoronto.ca/ai/pdfdoc/richard_kagan_brief.pdf, 7.

¹⁷³ Jerome Cohen, Profile NYU Law School, <http://its.law.nyu.edu/faculty/profiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=cv.main&personID=19840> March 19, 2012.

Pfeffer studied modern business contracts, comparing contract law in Communist China to contract law in the United States.

Working with this established, older generation of scholars, Pfeffer was taught the lessons and values of liberal, objective scholarship. In his 1965 work, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Barrington Moore, a political sociologist, insisted on a solely scientific academic approach, one that sought to verify all facts with empirical evidence.¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Professors like Fairbank and Huntington taught Pfeffer liberalist theories of nation-building. Fairbank inculcated in Pfeffer the modernizationist narrative of Chinese history, emphasizing China's encounter with the West as the turning point in its otherwise circular historical trajectory. Samuel Huntington taught that all democratizing nations, as they undergo a process of social modernization, must necessarily undergo a rigorous process of political consolidation and stabilization. In reflecting on his academic career, Pfeffer acknowledges the profound influence of his liberal mentors on his own thinking and research:

When I began in the early sixties to study and write about contracts in China, I was a believer. I believed with only the usual liberal reservations, in the mythologies of the American political and legal systems...My beliefs, of course, were reflected...in my scholarship: in the topics chosen; in the questions asked, and those not asked; and in the language and methodologies used."¹⁷⁵

Here, Pfeffer suggests that, like his academic mentors, his understanding of China was limited in its framework by a deep-seated faith in the supremacy of American democratic values.

But with his 1967 departure from Harvard and his arrival at the newly established Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs in Chicago, Pfeffer began to rethink his political and

¹⁷⁴ Dennis Smith, "Obituary: Barrington Moore—Author of a Daring Sociological Classic," <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/barrington-moore-515628.html> *The Independent*, November 17, 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Richard Pfeffer, *Understanding Business Contracts in China, 1949-1963* (New York: East Asian Research Center Harvard University, 1973), Preface.

intellectual life. Serving as one of the Institute's first Fellows, Pfeffer edited the book *No More Vietnams?: The War and the Future of American Foreign Policy*. Born out of a June 1968 conference of government officials, journalists and scholars, the book offered a wide range of opinions on Vietnam and American foreign policy. Pfeffer was introduced to the ideas of thinkers from across the political spectrum, ranging from Henry Kissinger to virulent anti-war activist Daniel Ellsberg. He worked particularly closely with Pakistani anti-war activist Eqbal Ahmad, another fellow at the Institute who only three years later was accused of conspiracy to kidnap Kissinger.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the Vietnam War helped to radicalize Pfeffer, forcing him to confront the moral failings of his own nation. It wasn't until the late 1960s, he admits, that he "became politically self-conscious"¹⁷⁷ and "deeply disillusioned and skeptical about American politics-its leaders, its values, and its institutions."¹⁷⁸

In this state of intellectual transition, Pfeffer entered into his first year as an Associate Professor of Political Science at The Johns Hopkins University. Around this time, Pfeffer also joined the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. Working with his "comrades" in the CCAS, Pfeffer underwent an ideological "awakening."¹⁷⁹ Increasingly, he began to see the connection between the "imperialist American foreign policy" agenda and the "self-satisfying frameworks" of the China field and American liberal scholarship. Disgusted with the "complacent, parochial, and self-righteous" work of his previous mentors, Pfeffer set out on a "quest" in search of "alternative frameworks for analysis."¹⁸⁰ Pfeffer, in this way, chose to channel his frustrations with contemporary American politics into the reconfiguration of his academic field.

¹⁷⁶ Edward Said, "Eqbal Ahmad," *The Guardian*, May 14, 1999.

¹⁷⁷ *Understanding Business Contracts in China, 1949-1963*, Preface.

¹⁷⁸ Richard Pfeffer, *Working for Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 4.

¹⁷⁹ *Understanding Business Contracts in China, 1949-1963*, xii.

¹⁸⁰ ¹⁸⁰ *Understanding Business Contracts in China, 1949-1963*, xi.

Pfeffer's 1970 article for the *Bulletin*, "Revolution and Rule: Where Do We Go From Here?" served as the first public statement of Pfeffer's new ideological orientation. In the article, a review of Ezra Vogel's new book *Canton Under Communism*, Pfeffer criticizes his former Harvard mentor for approaching the Chinese Revolution with the "typical" biases and "presuppositions" of "liberal scholarship." Vogel, Pfeffer writes, cannot see beyond the dogmas of Modernization Theory. Overly absorbed in methods of "rational administration...and control," Vogel gravely undervalues "revolutionary spirit, class struggle, and commitment." By critiquing Vogel in this way, Pfeffer announces his departure from the legacy of his own education. But Pfeffer goes even a step further, insisting that his own experience of scholarly transformation should be universalized. In posing the question "where do we go from here?," Pfeffer challenges his colleagues to move beyond the "limitations" of old approaches and enter with him into a new era of China scholarship.¹⁸¹

By the early 1970s, Pfeffer had fully embraced the rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution as a counterargument to the lessons imparted by his old professors. Under the leadership of Mao, China appeared to be on an altogether new historical trajectory. Instead of accepting the logic of Western modernization, that increases in production necessitate increases in bureaucratic and political stratification, the Chinese seemed to be in the process of re-strengthening rather than abandoning their revolutionary values. According to Pfeffer, in the aftermath of the 1949 Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party was faced with the challenge of maintaining its ideals while exercising governmental and administrative power. "The question," Pfeffer writes, "was whether they would be sufficiently self-motivated...to maintain the egalitarian...revolutionary elan, style, and content...or seemingly...lose this virtue." Between

¹⁸¹ Richard Pfeffer, "Revolution and Rule: Where Do We Go From Here?" *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 2, No. 3, April-July 1970, 89.

1949 and 1965, the need for “centralize[d] rule and technological and material advance had indeed led to the “disintegration of the revolutionary movement” and the “dominance of nonrevolutionary rule.”¹⁸² But through the Cultural Revolution, Mao and his Communist Party sought to resist this shift, insisting that technological and economic growth did not have to be coupled with the loss of ideological fervor. According to Pfeffer, the Cultural Revolution represented a return to the participatory and collectivist values of the earlier revolutionary period. The “Maoist institutions and ideals...developed in the Yen-an and final civil war periods,” he writes, “have been revived and adapted to Chinese society of the 1970s.”¹⁸³ To Pfeffer, the Chinese people were engaged in a unique movement “against history,” challenging Western notions of modernization as a realist, anti-ideological process and demanding instead a greater “pursuit of purity.”¹⁸⁴ One can read out Pfeffer’s allegiance to the Cultural Revolution in the titles of his early 1970s publications: *The Pursuit of Purity: Mao’s Cultural Revolution* and *Serving the People and Continuing the Revolution*. In both of these titles, Pfeffer expresses his admiration for the Chinese insistence on continual upheaval in the face of political stagnation.

For Pfeffer, the United States represented all that the Chinese, in enacting the Cultural Revolution, hoped to avoid. Pfeffer was convinced that by the late 1960’s the United States was in a state of political and moral crisis. In the process of modernization, America had willingly sacrificed its democratic values for the “right of a small minority...to make large profits”¹⁸⁵ and in the quest for unadulterated economic development, American institutions had become “static,

¹⁸² Richard Pfeffer, “Leaders and Masses,” in *China’s Developmental Experience*, ed. Michael Oksenberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 161.

¹⁸³ “Leaders and Masses,” 157.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Pfeffer, “The Pursuit of Purity: Mao’s Cultural Revolution,” in *China in Ferment*, ed. Richard Baum (New York: Prentice Hall Inc, 1971), 207.

¹⁸⁵ *Working for Capitalism*, 2.

privatized system[s] of democratic elitism.”¹⁸⁶ For Pfeffer, equality, as a concept had come to mean its opposite. “Across the board,” he writes, “we have settled for equality of opportunity—which is to say gross inequality in practice.” Genuine political participation too had been cast aside as only an inefficiency. Rather than become more intimately involved in daily political life, Americans had “accepted the inevitability of elite domination...sett[ling] for formalisms like biannual elections and the narrow competition that exists between elites.”¹⁸⁷ For Pfeffer, the American approach to modernization was precisely what the Chinese were so courageously resisting. In focusing only on the need for continued development and production, the United States had turned into a soulless land of inequity and exploitation.

Disgusted with American political leadership and inspired by the epochal language of the Cultural Revolution, by the early 1970s Pfeffer had become convinced that Chinese communism could succeed precisely where capitalism had failed, completing his political and ideological transformation. “I came to what for me then was a shocking conclusion,” he writes. “The success China had achieved in creating a just and egalitarian society might be intimately related to socialism; and the fundamental failure of the United States to create such a society might be intimately related to capitalism.”¹⁸⁸ By his second year as a political scientist at Johns Hopkins, Pfeffer had become a full-fledged Maoist. In fact, Pfeffer was, at this point, so confident in the integrity of Maoism that he believed it could only be compromised by external forces. “It remains to be seen,” Pfeffer writes, “whether China can continue to progress...or has, instead, reached limits of what can be achieved in...a world...dominated by capitalist forces.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ “Leaders and Masses,” 157.

¹⁸⁷ “Leaders and Masses,” 173.

¹⁸⁸ *Working for Capitalism*, 4.

¹⁸⁹ *Working for Capitalism*, 379.

Frustrated by the lack of support for Maoism amongst his academic colleagues, Pfeffer attributed this hostility to a political narrow-mindedness. As an outsider blinded by his own biases, the American scholar of China, Pfeffer writes, "perhaps never shall be at a stage" where he can appreciate all the facets of so momentous" an event as the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹⁰ As a reclamation of original revolutionary values, Pfeffer continues, the Cultural Revolution is almost incomprehensible to the typical American scholar, who can only conceive of modernization as a process of increasing affluence and administrative control. Pfeffer argues that it is difficult for "Western minds," so trapped in the logic of their own historical progression towards modernity, to appreciate the Chinese "vision of a more humane existence."¹⁹¹ Here, Pfeffer suggests that it is precisely the visionary nature of the Cultural Revolution that makes it subject to unfair criticism by those who have failed to imagine a better reality.

In his 1976 article, "Mao and Marx in the Marxist-Leninist Tradition," Pfeffer criticizes American China-scholars for allowing their political prejudices to cloud their perception of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution. Pfeffer attacks Harvard academics and renowned China scholars Benjamin Schwartz and Stuart Schram for mischaracterizing Mao as a Marxist "deviant" perverting the "presumed immutable axioms...principles...[and] sacred orthodoxy" of socialism. Pfeffer argues that by refusing to acknowledge Mao as a legitimate inheritor of the Marxist tradition, China scholars like Schwartz and Schram have managed to "safely enshrine" Marx "in a tomb," ignoring the ways in which Marx's thinking continues to inspire the Chinese people and their leadership. By insisting on a strictly "scholastic" interpretation of Marxism, the China field

¹⁹⁰ "The Pursuit of Purity: Mao's Cultural Revolution," 205.

¹⁹¹ "The Pursuit of Purity: Mao's Cultural Revolution," 223.

had made it impossible “at least in the Third World...to be a revolutionary Marxist.”¹⁹² In this way, Pfeffer suggests that in denying Mao a Marxist legacy, China scholars have revealed their own Cold War biases against any nation that seeks to apply Marxist principles, employing their own academic version of Cold-War containment policy.

In reaction to his more skeptical colleagues, Ric Pfeffer defends even the most glaringly problematic aspects of the Cultural Revolution. Pfeffer argues that the chaos and destruction of the movement are all necessary missteps in the greater “pursuit of purity.” “Such mistakes,” he writes, “are an inevitable part of the process of repeatedly testing the limits of historical conditions on societal change.” Pfeffer even goes as far as to suggest that the widespread violence of the movement serves as encouraging evidence of its support amongst the Chinese masses. “The very mention” of such “problems,” he argues, “suggests that mass participation has not been a mere formality.”¹⁹³ Here, Pfeffer implies that violence is inherent in any truly populist movement. Indeed, he concludes that a lack of violence must mean the maintenance of the “status quo.”¹⁹⁴ By insisting on the Cultural Revolution’s status as a groundbreaking and absolutely unique political project, Pfeffer frees the Chinese masses and their leadership from conventional moral responsibilities.

Pfeffer also defends the Chinese deification of Mao, arguing that the formation of the leader’s cult of personality was not merely a political move, but a necessary acquisition of power in the process of revolutionary change. Pfeffer compares Mao to Rousseau’s “great-legislator” who “understands the needs of the masses, epitomizes the national character, and at the same

¹⁹² Richard Pfeffer, “Mao and Marx in the Marxist-Leninist Tradition,” *Modern China*, Vol.2 No.4, October 1976, 427.

¹⁹³ “Leaders and Masses,” 165.

¹⁹⁴ “The Pursuit of Purity: Mao’s Cultural Revolution,” 225.

time embodies their highest moral concerns.” Under the leadership of Mao, “the first leader in history who has substantially retained his radical purity,” China no longer needed the same restrictions on the exercise of power. In fact, the cult of Mao served as a valuable “weapon” against the elitism and bureaucratization of the Chinese Party and government. Similarly, Pfeffer insists that Mao’s empowerment of the People’s Liberation Army and the ensuing militarization of Chinese leadership represented an attempt to create in the PLA an “embodiment of Maoist virtue” and an organization capable of “wag[ing] permanent revolution.”¹⁹⁵ By idealizing Mao as an untainted spokesman for the Chinese masses, Pfeffer refutes those, like Schwartz and Schram, who he believes unfairly demonize Mao as a “senile” and politically greedy weaver of Marxist propaganda.¹⁹⁶

For Pfeffer, the differences between Cultural Revolution China and capitalist America were best understood within the context of education. According to Pfeffer, the elitism of American education had created a vast divide between mental and physical labor. American scholars were totally divorced from the realities of working life and their research had no real consequences for the American people. Pfeffer laments that “[n]ever in [his] education at so-called elite universities...did any of my courses seriously consider the topic of work and its implications.”¹⁹⁷ He even goes as far as to suggest that at an early age, American students are selected by their teachers to become either mental or physical workers, creating a powerful divide within classrooms. Early on [t]eachers...single out a few children and communicate to all that the few are different. The result is that the few do perform better, and the many come to realize that teachers react with less enthusiasm to their performances and are discouraged.” Here,

¹⁹⁵ “The Pursuit of Purity: Mao’s Cultural Revolution,” 216-222.

¹⁹⁶ “Mao and Marx in the Marxist-Leninist Tradition,” 428.

¹⁹⁷ *Working for Capitalism*, 1.

Pfeffer implies that the American educational system plays an initial role in reproducing class-based inequalities. According to Pfeffer, this educational elitism had a devastating impact on the “ordinary worker,” who became a mindless performer of tasks, working for the improvement of the American economy at the expense of his own sense of self-worth, unable to “develop into [a] valuable human being.”¹⁹⁸

By contrast, it seemed to Pfeffer that in China the educational reforms of the Cultural Revolution had successfully bridged the gap between mental and physical labor, allowing for the profound personal transformation of intellectuals, cadres, and the working masses. By reorienting the university system towards “concrete needs,” the Chinese government had made research relevant to daily life and given the masses a new stake in education. At Chinese colleges, Pfeffer reports, “students study disciplines related to the needs of their work units of origin” and are expected to return to these work units after graduation. In addition, members of the Chinese “lower-middle-peasant majority” had been given a new sense of ownership over the university system, playing a “major decision-making role” in determining which members of their local communities have the “character and talents” for higher education. For Pfeffer, the educational initiatives of the Cultural Revolution appeared to extend even beyond traditional academia. At May 7th Cadre Schools, the “divorced self-cultivation” and elitism of the Chinese leadership was broken down. Cadres were forced to perform manual labor and go amongst the Chinese peasantry. In this way, not just the university, but all of China became a “great school for learning Marxism-Leninism.”¹⁹⁹ By forcing cadre, intellectuals, and students to renounce their elitism, Mao and the Communist Party had endowed the labor of the masses with a deeper meaning: “[M]en worked and saw their work in terms of contributing to the revolution. Working

¹⁹⁸ *Working for Capitalism*, 305.

¹⁹⁹ “Leaders and Masses,” 167-169.

for themselves by working for the movement was something from which the masses...took great satisfaction.”²⁰⁰

Tenure and Revolution

In his time at The Johns Hopkins University from 1969 to 1979, Ric Pfeffer worked hard to apply his Maoist principles and challenge the educational status quo. By consistently stepping outside of the academic ivory tower, Pfeffer sought to map onto the American university the political and educational initiatives of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

From the time of his arrival at Hopkins, Pfeffer insisted on defining himself as a non-traditional academic. Pfeffer was uniquely involved in campus life, taking a leading role in student council forums on the nature of undergraduate education and assisting in the formation of a student political caucus.²⁰¹ Pfeffer developed what was considered an “unusual” rapport with his students. In intimate conversations, Pfeffer was known to pose difficult “questions of social justice,”²⁰² forcing his students to “justify their being...at Hopkins”²⁰³ and challenging their sense of entitlement. Pfeffer’s less formal relationships with this students and his deep commitment to their education made him extremely popular. He was elected “Best Teacher of the Year” once and asked to speak at faculty commencement twice.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ “Leaders and Masses,” 160.

²⁰¹ An Open Letter to President Steven Muller, April 11, 1977, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²⁰² An Open Letter to President Steven Muller.

²⁰³ Letter to President Steven Muller from the Board of Trustees, April 4, 1977, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²⁰⁴ Cliff Durand, “The Legacy of Ric Pfeffer,” Baltimore Indy Media, July 25, 2002.
<http://baltimore.indymedia.org/newswire/display/1318/index.php>.

In and out of the classroom, Pfeffer did not hesitate to express his political views. Throughout the Vietnam War years, he led, and spoke at marches and rallies against the war, mobilizing a campus that had been politically inactive before his arrival. Pfeffer even helped to organize a demonstration against the University's Applied Physics Lab, which was known for being a Defense Department contractor.²⁰⁵ In addition, Pfeffer used his status as a left-wing member of the China field to bring to campus former American diplomat to China John S. Service as well as a theatrical performance of William Hinton's socialist-leaning book *Fanshen*. In the classroom, Pfeffer spoke openly about his Maoist allegiances, using his own political ideology as "a challenge to his students."²⁰⁶ According to graduate student Michael T. Tilles, Pfeffer gave his students exposure to a "diversity of political opinions" and provided for them the "tools of Marxian analysis" through which they could begin to understand the values of socialism.²⁰⁷

As part of his larger goal to integrate the American university into the realities of the working world, Pfeffer became very actively involved in life outside of the campus. Pfeffer was known as an "active, contributing member" to the city of Baltimore, speaking frequently to community groups and organizing student-faculty community service initiatives.²⁰⁸ Pfeffer developed close working relationships with social workers at a family services agency in Baltimore County as well as with the President of the Public School Board, the director of the Department of Social Services, the executive director of the Commission on Ageing and

²⁰⁵ Durand

²⁰⁶ An Open Letter to President Steven Muller.

²⁰⁷ Letter to President Steven Muller from Michael T. Tilles, May 7, 1977, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²⁰⁸ Letter to President Steven Muller from Clifford Durand, April 20, 1977, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

Retirement Education, and a leading member of the Governor's Council on Alcoholism.²⁰⁹

Along with two other radicalized Hopkins professors, Pfeffer helped to form a center for progressive activism in Baltimore, serving as a ring leader for activism both on campus and in the city.

In his personal life too, Pfeffer very consciously tried to enact his political views. In their first few years at Hopkins, Pfeffer and his family formed the only white household in an almost exclusively working-class, black neighborhood. Pfeffer's son Soren recalls how his father made a point of befriending everyone in the area, from his next-door neighbor to the garbage man: "He was the type of person who could talk to anybody. It didn't matter who they were or what their socioeconomic level was...It was a part of his politics...He saw everybody as equal...They were equal even if their position in society was not equal." But Pfeffer's attempts to lead an unadulterated political life could even border on the absurd. After buying a broken Volkswagen, Pfeffer returned to the local dealership demanding a different car. When this request was denied, he mobilized his whole family, his wife, his teenage son, and his six-month old daughter, to make signs and picket outside the dealership. Pfeffer's family protested for hours until they were given a new car.²¹⁰

Though inspiring to many students, locals, and Baltimore activists, Pfeffer's unconventional style and politics rubbed some of the more conservative members of the community the wrong way. At a campus-wide forum, Pfeffer was heard to have responded to the comments of the school's guest speaker Reverend Leon Sullivan by declaring his entire

²⁰⁹ Letter to Dr. George E. Owen from members of the Baltimore Community, April 26, 1977. , File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²¹⁰ Interview with Soren Pfeffer, April 14, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

speech “unadulterated bullshit,” appalling both alumni and faculty.²¹¹ Similarly, in a 1977 letter found at The Johns Hopkins University archives, an elderly woman describes her outrage at this “most objectionable man”: “He was arrogant, profane, vulgar, and disrespectful in what he had to say. When I heard him, besides being infuriated, I was thankful that none of my children would ever be taught by him.”²¹² Beside his egregious use of “four letter words,” Pfeffer’s willingness to speak openly about his politics was also deeply offensive to many.²¹³ In a letter written by Theodore Woolsey Johnson Junior, the son of a former Hopkins student, he reveals the paranoia that having professors like Pfeffer on campus could create. Woolsey worries that “this man who despises the American system of government and preaches revolution” might “spread his treasonous philosophies among the student body.”²¹⁴ Indeed, from his early years at Hopkins, Pfeffer was, as his close friend and colleague Professor Richard Cone put it, a “sore thumb for many and a leading spirit for others.”²¹⁵

But Pfeffer’s ultimate challenge to the university status quo wouldn’t come until 1974 during his seven-month sabbatical leave. As part of his research for his new book on American labor, *Working for Capitalism*, Pfeffer began working at a local Baltimore factory operating a forklift truck. From the outset, Pfeffer understood that this choice would put his entire academic career at risk. “Working in a factory,” he wrote, “was not a course of action likely to impress my colleagues in political science with my professionalism.” But ultimately, for Pfeffer, his need to go amongst the working masses and challenge the “narrowly professionalized” nature of

²¹¹ Letter to Steven Muller from Robert Tate, 1977, , File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²¹² Letter to President Steven Muller from Mrs. William W. Downes, October 20, 1977, , File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²¹³ Letter to President Steven Muller from Robert Tate.

²¹⁴ Letter to President Steven Muller from Theodore Woolsey Johnson Junior, 1978, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²¹⁵ Interview with Richard Cone, March 28, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

American scholarship outweighed all personal costs.²¹⁶ Pfeffer found, time and again, inspiration from the Cultural Revolution for his own scholarly project. Frustrated by the way in which his “own work life in the university was so separated from the work lives of the majority of Americans,” Pfeffer refused to become what the Chinese called a “three-gate cadre”:
 “someone who has moved from the gate of the family, through the gate of the school, and then on through the gate of work unscathed by any prolonged experience of the sort of labor common to most members of society.”²¹⁷ Like Chinese intellectuals toiling in the field with the masses, Pfeffer tried to do his part to bridge the American divide between mental and physical labor.

As Pfeffer predicted, *Working for Capitalism* did not go over well with his colleagues at Hopkins. In 1977, Pfeffer was denied tenure from the political science department, largely because his book, while accepted for publication by Columbia University Press and the Monthly Review, was deemed lacking in “higher professional standards.”²¹⁸ According to Pfeffer, four of the more conservative members of the department were particularly offended by the work and opposed to Pfeffer’s acceptance into the department, consistently voting and speaking out against him at all departmental meetings.

In response to these accusations of unprofessionalism, Pfeffer once again took the opportunity to challenge the university’s academic norms. In a letter to the Hopkins’ Academic Council, Pfeffer openly questions the idea of professionalism, suggesting that such a construct only serves to limit academic possibilities:

I do not believe that ‘professional standards’ should be treated like sacred cows. There are more scholarly modes for understanding the nature of the world than today’s

²¹⁶ *Working for Capitalism*, 12.

²¹⁷ *Working for Capitalism*, 5.

²¹⁸ Letter to the Academic Council from Richard Pfeffer, May 13, 1977, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

professionalism would legitimate. My own scholarship, as exemplified by the book... is increasingly unconventional in its ideological and political standpoints, as well as in its style. To the majority of academics, who work within the bounds of prevailing conventions, such scholarship is likely to appear 'ideological' or 'too politicized.'... Such judgments, of course, are implicit in the very fact of dominant conventions.²¹⁹

Here, in defending his work, Pfeffer echoes the transformative and revolutionary language of the CCAS Statement of Purpose. Pfeffer suggests that his work is unappreciated, not because of its lack of quality, but because of the time and place in which it is being read.

For Pfeffer, accusations of unprofessionalism seemed to operate as code for a more direct disdain for his politics. Pfeffer describes how in meetings with the political science department on the subject of his scholarship, his colleagues could hardly contain their animosity. According to Pfeffer, after the initial department decision to deny tenure, one particularly aggressive professor told him that his "very presence was an 'intended provocation' to him." Another reportedly told Pfeffer that his colleagues could not afford to have such an "eccentric/idiosyncratic" representing the political science department. A third claimed that he had not liked Pfeffer's book "from the first sentence," announcing his "conviction that 'Marxism is mistaken and dangerous.'"²²⁰ Professor Richard Cone describes how in advocating on behalf of Pfeffer, he met with one colleague who became particularly agitated at the prospect of granting him tenure, jumping up onto the sofa and screaming, 'There's no way that man's going to get promoted here!'²²¹ Even Hopkins' President Steven Muller, supposedly unaffiliated with the tenure decision, could not hide his political biases against Pfeffer. In private correspondence, Muller reassured concerned community members and alumni that he did "not

²¹⁹ Letter to the Academic Council from Richard Pfeffer.

²²⁰ Letter to the Academic Council from Richard Pfeffer.

²²¹ Interview with Richard Cone.

agree with Dr. Pfeffer's view."²²² Yet, Muller insisted that "despite his Marxist views," Pfeffer was "entitled to due process as much as anyone else on the faculty." Here, though Muller argues in favor of Pfeffer's right to a fair hearing, he reveals just how much Pfeffer's Maoist politics colored the ways in which he was perceived. These types of displays of political bias convinced Pfeffer and his supporters that the university was not offended by the quality of Pfeffer's work but rather by his "decidedly strenuous political views."²²³

For Pfeffer and many of his advocates, it seemed that the university, mired in its own elitism, was unwilling to acknowledge his standing in the leftist wing of the China studies field. Numerous members of the CCAS, including Peck and Noam Chomsky, sent letters of protest to President Muller, insisting on Pfeffer's intellectual talents and demanding that the University's Academic Council form an ad-hoc committee of China specialists to reconsider Pfeffer's bid for tenure and reevaluate his scholarly work.²²⁴ Pfeffer too demanded the formation of this committee, demanding his right to be judged by scholars with actual knowledge of his field, rather than his colleagues at Hopkins, none of whom "writes or even teaches...remotely" about anything to do with "China...work in America, or capitalism."²²⁵ For activist student Lynn Snyder, the university's reluctance to form an ad-hoc committee and its unwillingness to acknowledge Pfeffer's broad support in left-wing circles amounted to political prejudice: "I find it hard to believe that renowned scholars (eg. Noam Chomsky...) would write a letter in support

²²² Letter to Theodore Woolsey Johnson Junior from President Steven Muller, March 1, 1978, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²²³ Letter to President Steven Muller from Grenville B. Whitman, April 18, 1977, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²²⁴ Letter to President Steven Muller from Morton H. Fried, Noam Chomsky, John S. Service and others to President Steven Muller, 1977, , File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²²⁵ Letter to the Academic Council from Richard Pfeffer.

of one whose work is meritless."²²⁶ To Pfeffer and his supporters, the University seemed to be "lean[ing] over backwards to undervalue [his] scholarship."²²⁷

Though the university was able to ignore the pleas of Pfeffer's CCAS supporters, the political science department's decision nevertheless created a community-wide uproar. Members of the Baltimore community sent letters to President Muller in droves, proclaiming their support for Pfeffer and demanding that the university's Academic Council reconsider the department's initial decision. Students too mobilized around the issue, organizing protests and pressuring the student council to act on Pfeffer's behalf. In October of 1977, the student council conducted a campus wide referendum on the issue of Pfeffer's tenure, leading to the largest student-voter turnout in Hopkins history and a powerful statement of student confidence in Pfeffer.²²⁸ In this way, Pfeffer's tenure conflict echoed his own approach to academics. Through his own failure to gain tenure, the too often divided forces of the working public and the university student body were finally in league. Indeed, at the time, Pfeffer was highly aware of this irony. In his May 13, 1977 letter to the Academic Council, Pfeffer writes that "the forms, substance, and questions raised by my appeal in some meaningful sense exemplify much of what I have done and been on campus."²²⁹ In his failure to gain academic legitimacy, Pfeffer had succeeded more than ever in changing university politics.

Due to the wide range of support for Pfeffer, the Academic Council chose to reconsider the political science department's decision. As requested, they formed an ad-hoc committee chaired by the esteemed oceanographer Owen Phillips. Phillips, described by the left-wing

²²⁶ Letter to President Steven Muller from Student Lynn Snyder, November 11, 1977, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²²⁷ Letter to the Academic Council from Richard Cone, May 4, 1977 File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²²⁸ Letter to President Steven Muller from Student Lynn Snyder.

²²⁹ Letter to the Academic Council from Richard Pfeffer.

Richard Cone as a political “stick in the mud,” requested twenty letters from the China studies field evaluating Pfeffer’s work. According to Cone, this was an unreasonable number of letters to request. Though many of the China scholars wrote very flattering letters describing the strengths of Pfeffer’s work, there were some who could not claim to be all that familiar with his scholarship. This, Cone insists, was unfairly taken as evidence of Pfeffer’s lack of scholarly accomplishment.²³⁰

Despite the tremendous efforts of the public and the student body, the decision of the political science department would stand. In its final vote, The Academic Council was divided evenly between left-wing supporters of Pfeffer and more conservative critics. But President Muller, who upon his arrival at Hopkins promised he would never break a tie in The Academic Council, stepped in to cast a deciding vote against Pfeffer.²³¹ On April 14, 1978, Pfeffer was notified by Dean Sigmund R. Suskind of the Arts and Sciences that he would be allowed to teach at Hopkins one more year, unaffiliated with any department, and with no salary increase.²³² Without any other employment opportunity, Pfeffer accepted Suskind’s offer thanking him for fulfilling “what at least was an ethical obligation.” But even in this sobering moment, Pfeffer took the opportunity to once again articulate his frustrations with the American university establishment:

In no sense do I believe I have received justice at the hands of the university. Nor do I believe that this university, or others like it, wants to know the truth about itself and about the society it serves. My loyalty is to the truth, as best as I can understand it. And the truth, it seems, ironically, has set me free.²³³

²³⁰ Interview with Richard Cone.

²³¹ Interview with Richard Cone.

²³² Letter to Richard Pfeffer from Sigmund Suskind, April 14, 1978, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²³³ Letter to Sigmund Suskind from Richard Pfeffer, May 2, 1978, , File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

Here, in his moment of defeat, Pfeffer imagines himself to be the victim of a society blinded by its own prejudices. In embracing his victimhood, Pfeffer suggests that he exists outside of his nation's social parameters, as the rare insider who has to pay the price for seeing things the way they actually are.

In a final act of academic revolution, it appears that Pfeffer wrote a note to President Muller on a copy of a poster-advertisement for his upcoming book party (See Page 91). The mug shot of Pfeffer in the left corner emphasizes his role as academic pariah and the text underneath tells the story of his courageous attempt at challenging scholarly norms. In between the text and the photo is a note from Pfeffer to Muller. It seems that Pfeffer, though defeated in his fight for tenure, understands the tremendous impact he has had on campus life. "Dear Steve," the note reads, "This has not been your highest hour."²³⁴ As always, Pfeffer's actions created controversy. In the note above his own, a critic of Pfeffer offers a very different message to the President: "Dear Steve: This is Show Biz. The remark by Ric is not even good Show Biz."²³⁵

Conclusion

In 1976, Mao Zedong passed away, bringing an end to the Cultural Revolution and marking the beginning of a new era in Chinese history. By 1978, Mao's revolutionary comrade Deng Xiaoping had come to power, initiating intensive economic reforms under the "four modernizations" of science and technology, mechanization of agriculture, material incentives in urban industrial production, and the re-institutionalization of hierarchy in the People's Liberation

²³⁴ Poster image from File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

²³⁵ "Meet the Author' Party" May 12, 1979, File on Richard Pfeffer, The Johns Hopkins University Archives, Sheridan Libraries.

Army.²³⁶ China had entered once again into an “expert” phase, putting ideology aside for the sake of development. By 1981, the party had dismissed the Cultural Revolution as a “gross mistake” on the part of Mao Zedong and the Chinese people.²³⁷ Maoist modernization, as Ric Pfeffer had imagined it, had come to an end.

The Cultural Revolution inspired in Ric Pfeffer a belief in a better reality, one which transcended the kind of materialism and elitism all too prevalent in the United States and particularly in the American university setting. Pfeffer tried his hardest to transfer what he saw as the best of the Cultural Revolution onto his own world of academia, but as with the Cultural Revolution itself, Pfeffer’s career in scholarship was swallowed up in a backlash against ideological fervor.

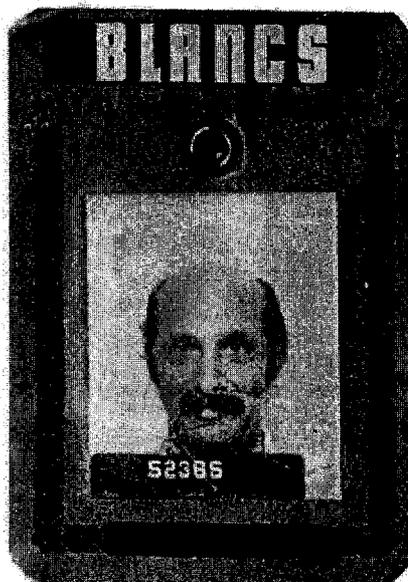
After being denied tenure, Pfeffer worked devotedly for The Legal Aid Society and then the government’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration, providing essential services to the workforce he had once dreamed of mobilizing. He passed away in 2002.

²³⁶ Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 162.

²³⁷ Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Part of China, “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China,” June 27, 1981, www.marxists.org/subject/document/cpc/history/01.htm.

"MEET THE AUTHOR" PARTY

George W. FI - Story



WORKING FOR CAPITALISM

*Dear Steve:
This is Show Big
the remark by
Ric is not even
good Show B.S*

The book, by Richard Pfeffer, "whose concern for truth has cost him his academic career."

—Staughton Lynd

*Dear Steve,
This has not been your
brightest hour. Ric*

For seven months, while on sabbatical from teaching political science at Johns Hopkins, Ric Pfeffer worked as a forklift operator in a Baltimore piston-ring factory. He emerged a confirmed Marxist and wrote WORKING FOR CAPITALISM, a vivid record and powerful statement of his experience with the crippling effects of capitalism. Because of this book, he subsequently was terminated at Johns Hopkins.

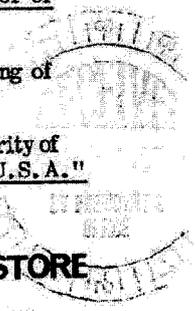
Since then, WORKING FOR CAPITALISM has been called:

"A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT....I recommend this book to anyone, layperson and scholar alike....Must reading."—Edward S. Greenberg, Professor of Political Science, University of Colorado

"An absorbing exposé....It RANKS RIGHT UP THERE WITH BRAVERMAN'S CLASSIC LABOR AND MONOPOLY CAPITAL."—John G. Gurley, Professor of Economics, Stanford University

"A rigorous, almost remorseless, quest for truth and rational understanding of American work relationships....It has persuaded me."—Staughton Lynd

"ENJOYABLE....lucid and instructive....Pfeffer's voice...has the authority of experience."—Barbara Kopple, producer and director of "Harlan County, U.S.A."



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Conclusion

In October 1979, Edward Said published his now hugely influential book *Orientalism*. For Said, Orientalism referred to the historical distinction Westerners have made between themselves and the exotic “other” of the Far East. Orientalism represented a huge body of “theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts,” creating essentialist characterizations of the Orient as a “surrogate,” “underground” version of the West.²³⁸ Academics, artists, and intellectuals produced knowledge that reflected more the “desires, repressions, investments, and projections” of the Western world than the “brute realt[ies]” of Eastern life.²³⁹ In misrepresenting the East, Said argues, Orientalists provided justification for the exercise of Western power and imperialist exploitation. Orientalists may have claimed to be representing the East as it really was, but their work was deeply infused with the greater Western “will” to “control” and “manipulate.”²⁴⁰

For Said, writing in the 1970s, modern Orientalism was different in form but not in content. The Orientalist project, he suggests, had moved from the imperialist powers of Europe to the educational institutions of the United States, where so-called “experts” instruct “policy on the basis of such marketable abstractions as...modernization, and stability.” These clichés, Said argues, are simply “the old Orientalist stereotypes dressed up in policy jargon,” allowing for the continued exploitation of Third-World nations and justifying war in Vietnam.²⁴¹ In response, Said calls on his fellow academics to be “vigilant” against developing “too close a relationship between the scholar and the state” and to undergo “continual self-examination” in an effort to transcend Orientalist frameworks. Though Said admits that “no production of knowledge...can

²³⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 3.

²³⁹ Said, 8.

²⁴⁰ Said, 12.

²⁴¹ Said, 321.

ever ignore...its author's involvement as a human subject," he insists that American academics can combat their prejudices and produce more empathetic work "based on concrete human history and experience."²⁴²

In many ways, the CCAS' attempt to reshape the field of East Asian Studies represented an effective challenge to Orientalism as Said defines it. In their scholarship and their activism, CCAS scholars vigorously challenged the relationship between academia and politics. Insisting on the impossibility of objective scholarship, they exposed supposedly neutral approaches like Modernization Theory as tools for the maintenance of the political status quo. And with this rejection of objectivity, they relentlessly attacked those in their field who they believed were producing work in service of corrupt, governmental ends. As Said demands, CCAS members engaged in a constant, painful process of self-examination and critique, exploring their own cultural biases and the ways in which these biases might impact their perception of Asia. Finally, the CCAS developed an altogether new method for the study of the foreign "other," one that sought to mitigate cultural misunderstanding through a radical process of identification. Indeed, *in Orientalism*, Said acknowledges the CCAS' efforts in combatting Orientalism, writing that the CCAS had effectively "led a revolution during the 1960s in the ranks of East Asia specialists."²⁴³

But for many of those CCAS members who wrote about the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the organization's new academic project proved no more successful than Orientalism at uncovering Chinese realities. Looking back on her experience as a contributor to the CCAS and a believer in the Cultural Revolution, Vera Schwarcz has very little sympathy for herself or her colleagues. She and her American comrades willingly cultivated an "informed ignorance" of

²⁴² Said, 327-328.

²⁴³ Said, 301.

China, taking a lack of direct access to the mainland as a “license for conjecture” rather than a demand for “modest[y].”²⁴⁴ Schwarcz describes how, in taking seriously Mao’s demand for continual revolution, she very conscientiously “discounted news of violence in China.”²⁴⁵ Indeed, when Schwarcz had the opportunity to finally visit China in 1979 and learn about the “horror stories” of the Cultural Revolution, she could not help but feel appalled at her previous self for having been so blind.

Looking back on her own misreading of the Cultural Revolution, Schwarcz discounts her attempts at identification with the Chinese masses as only naïve. Schwarcz cynically describes her attempts to bring Chinese-style self-criticism into her classroom:

I was very attached to the idea that knowledge was deepened by the cadres being amongst the people and being criticized by them... Now I look back... and I look at our classroom... Was I a cadre? What was really our relationship? Now we could talk and criticize but in the end I give grades and not you. So it was my effort to take Mao’s idea and try to... bridge the gap between myself and the students.²⁴⁶

Here, Schwarcz highlights and critiques the unique way in which CCAS China scholars sought to transfer Cultural Revolution rhetoric and ideology onto their own scholarship and scholarly institutions. In demonstrating at Southern Illinois University or challenging the academic status quo at The Johns Hopkins University, CCAS China scholars did indeed keep an eye towards China and the innovative reforms they imagined Mao Zedong and the Chinese masses to be enacting. But for Schwarcz, this amounted to childish play-acting, creating a reverse Orientalism in which idealization and over-identification became the new mode for complete cultural misinterpretation.

²⁴⁴ Vera Schwarcz, *Long Road Home: A China Journal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xiv.

²⁴⁵ Schwarcz, xv.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Vera Schwarcz, January 10, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

CCAS China scholars did at times underestimate the difficulties of cross-cultural translation. Preferring to believe in their ability to adopt “Chinese eyes,” many of these scholars rejected Said’s warning that even the most self-aware scholar can never fully escape his own cultural biases. Caught up in the “ethical” and “political” consequences of China scholarship, these academics were too often unaware of the ways in which they limited their understanding of the Cultural Revolution to fit their own needs.²⁴⁷ CCAS scholars did not want to acknowledge that, despite the intensity of their efforts to fully align themselves with the Chinese masses, they could only achieve at best a “rough translation.”²⁴⁸ Reflecting on his experience with the CCAS, Edward Friedman scolds some of his more radical colleagues for failing to recognize the limitations of their own knowledge:

I was amazed at their confidence that they knew exactly what was happening and what it meant and that it had all of these consequences and implications...And so people who were going out there and wanting to tell me why a dictatorship was a wonderful kind of thing are not having very much of a positive impact on me...And the Cultural Revolution...as if it was telling us the better future for the human species. I mean, God, that’s all beyond me.²⁴⁹

Here, Friedman illustrates the way in which his fellow China scholars used a lack of information to their intellectual advantage, filling the void with their own hopes and dreams rather than attempting to learn more about Chinese realities.

Certainly the embarrassment of misunderstanding the Cultural Revolution has contributed to the withdrawal of many former CCAS members from radical left-wing scholarship. CCAS graduate student David Horowitz, once a leftist advocate for reform in China studies at Columbia University, has in recent years totally reoriented himself politically, forming the David

²⁴⁷ Said, 327.

²⁴⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Edward Friedman, February 8, 2012, Nathan Karnovsky.

Horowitz Freedom Center, a conservative organization that “combats the efforts of the radical left...to destroy American values.”²⁵⁰ In a similar but less extreme case, Victor Nee, the author of *The Cultural Revolution at Peking University*, has chosen a much more middle-of-the-road approach to scholarship since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Nee has written a number of books and articles on the merits of the capitalist system in the United States and in China. On his faculty profile page for the Cornell University website, Nee does not list *The Cultural Revolution at Peking University* as one of his publications.²⁵¹

But in his 1984 book *Discovering History in China*, Paul Cohen, a former student at the Harvard East Asian Research Center and a Professor at Wellesley College, takes a much more positive view of the CCAS and its early contributions to China studies. Cohen credits the young graduate students and professors of the CCAS for challenging outdated modes of studying China and reinvigorating the field. Unlike their predecessors, who in recounting Chinese history “attached little explanatory value to factors internal” to China,²⁵² CCAS members demanded a new methodology that “begins Chinese history in China rather than in the West, and adopts, as far as humanly possible, internal (Chinese) rather than external (Western) criteria.” Here, Cohen commends CCAS members for attempting to transcend their own cultural narrowness, suggesting that in doing so, they had effectively made the field more “China-Centered.”²⁵³ For Cohen, CCAS scholars had answered Said’s call, “moving away from Western-centric paradigms...and...deal[ing] a blow to...imperialism.”²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ “About the Center,” David Horowitz Freedom Center, <http://www.horowitzfreedomcenter.org/about/>.

²⁵¹ “Victor Nee: Frank and Rosa Rhodes Professor, Director of the Center for the Study of Economy and Society,” <http://www.horowitzfreedomcenter.org/about/>.

²⁵² Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 190.

²⁵³ Cohen, 186.

²⁵⁴ Cohen, 187.

Cohen suggests that the legacy of CCAS China scholars extends far beyond their interpretations of the Cultural Revolution. Though their study of the Cultural Revolution had become intellectually and emotionally intertwined with their own scholarly dissatisfactions, this initial misstep was part of a larger progress towards a necessary end: the reorientation of the China field. In the case of the Cultural Revolution, one can accuse these scholars of failing just as badly as any Orientalist to understand the realities of Chinese life. But ironically, these misguided studies created a new space for more culturally sensitive approaches.

Indeed, it would be foolish to dismiss the efforts of CCAS China scholars simply because of their failure to understand the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. Doing so would enforce the notion of an oversimplified, singular historical reality, placing all value only on 'getting it right.' Instead, we must acknowledge the power of one historical moment to engender others of an entirely different nature. The Chinese Cultural Revolution, in many ways a nightmare in China, brought about an intellectual awakening in American academia.

The example of the CCAS certainly illustrates the creative potential in mistranslation. These China scholars chose to bracket their understanding of the Cultural Revolution in order to make a larger argument and effect a set of more immediate changes. In this way, studying the CCAS raises important questions about when it is intellectually or politically necessary to insist on the simplified part rather than the more complicated whole. Indeed, the CCAS' misinformed narrative of the Cultural Revolution captures the initial excitement that the movement did in fact produce before more brutal realities set in. In her memoir *Spider Eaters*, Rae Yang, a Chinese student during the Cultural Revolution, describes the movement's early educational reforms as inspirational in precisely the way that the CCAS would have imagined: "Suddenly I felt that I was allowed to think with my own head and say what was on my mind...When the Cultural

Revolution broke out...I felt like the legendary monkey Sun Wukong, freed from the dungeon that had held him...for five hundred years.”²⁵⁵ As the CCAS would have argued, too often more whole, supposedly objective approaches tend to reinforce retrograde politics. Critics of violent revolution were certainly not advocating for progressive change in the United States and those who enforced the status quo were not necessarily less delusional than their radical counterparts. Thus, to critique the scholarly movement inspired and informed by the Cultural Revolution as only an irresponsible mistranslation of a distant, Chinese historical event is to reinforce a set of outdated American academic and political norms. Enforcing the historical necessity of ‘getting it right’ has, in fact, served only to shame those who were radicalized during the 1960’s, allowing for the proliferation of even more historical inaccuracies towards new political ends.

²⁵⁵ Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1997), 115.

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